Love Hurst
Episode 1 The Way Back
By
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The year is 2013 AN. The place is St.Godwinson's Academy for Shattered Souls.

The lecturer is Claudia M Green, a trans woman and a half elf, a mere 200 years of age. She stood before the class in a green suit that complemented her dappled green skin, her eyes were the pink of freshly filleted salmon, half her head was shaved, she had pointy ears, a nose ring and an ear ring. She stood before a blackboard with the word 'Bluebeard' scrawled across it in Elvish. "Now class can anyone tell me the number one way to avoid falling victim to a predator?"

Alison Benchley was 27, skinny, dark skinned, Vligury, brunette and wearing jeans and a cardigan. She sat nervously near the front.

A dark skinned dragonborn near the back raised a hand.

Claudia nodded them on.

The student spoke with the casual confidence of male privilege. "Well, Miss, surely the best way to prevent predation is for predators not to predate."

The lecture hall erupted in a smattering of polite laughter.

Claudia smirked while she waited for the students to quieten down. "A valid point, a valid point indeed, but ultimately unhelpful if you are before the sight of a predator, so what do you do?"

A goblin woman with dappled yellow and green skin raised a hand and was nodded on. "My ma says that if a predator reaches out to you, you hit them hard then run."

Claudia nodded. "A better answer but I am not talking about predatory people. There will always be people who won't take no for an answer. The predators I'm talking about don't need to take no for an answer because they rely on consent to make their prey feel safe with them. After all, if you are a predator aren't you that much more secure if your prey thinks they have consented?"

Alison raised her hand nervously.

Claudia smiled reassuringly as her gaze settled upon Alison.

"But surely if it's consensual there is nothing wrong with it right?" asked Alison.

Claudia chuckled darkly and walked around the table to lean back against it, her arms folded. "Therein lies the danger. The predators of yore were rumoured to possess abilities like soul reading." Claudia looked back at Alison. "One look into your eyes and they could read your every memory and details about you that you might not even know yourself. That's where the idea of demons making people gay and trans came from, the demonically empowered could literally read the truth people had yet to figure out about themselves."

Alison swallowed.

Claudia uncrossed her arms and gripped the edge of her table. "The other danger of course is the

predators of yore are Vampires, Ghouls, Weresharks and Elder God Followers, people who had the ability to alter the reality of their prey. One drop of their blood or one dose of their magic potions and you would be forever under their thrall."

Alison stared.

Claudia laughed. "I am of course talking about mystical beings that have been proven to be fantasy."

The hands of the clock on the wall behind Claudia moved from north east to true north and students started packing away their notebooks.

Alison rose from her seat and approached Claudia cautiously.

Claudia was sorting through the stuff on her table when she heard Alison coughing nervously. She rose and turned to meet Alison.

"Umm, Miss, you never actually answered the question." said Alison nervously.

"Like how to avoid a predator who wants to make you consent?" asked Claudia.

Alison nodded. "Do you know?"

"Well, run." said Claudia with a shrug.

"That's it, run?" asked Alison, a touch of fear in her voice.

Claudia nodded. "Well yeah, these are predators who pride themselves on doing everything the right way. They won't do anything illegal and they won't do anything to alienate their prey if they can help it. Every move will be part of a coordinated dance to ensnare their victims deeper under their power. The only way to avoid that is to run and never look back."

Alison looked like she had just come to a horrifying realization. "Thank you, Miss, you have been very helpful."

"Alison?" asked Claudia sharply. "You weren't asking about mythology were you?"

Alison shook her head.

Claudia thought for a long moment then said. "Of course there is another thing you could do?"

Alison shrugged. "Lets hear it."

Claudia nodded, she pursed her lips in concentration then she suggested. "These predators work by understanding their prey and offering them a fate they will consent to, a fate they will hopefully enjoy with great enthusiasm..."

"You're saying I should go willingly?" asked Alison incredulously.

"I didn't say that." said Claudia pointedly. "If you have attracted a predator from mythology my advice to run and keep running but if there comes a point when you can't run any more there's no shame in going willingly, in the hope that your predator cares about your consent that much."

Alison swallowed. “I’m not the first student who has come to you with concerns, am I?”

“No.” said Claudia flatly.

Alison looked clearly pained but she asked. “You ever heard from any of them again?”

Claudia shook her head. “I do report everyone who goes missing to the authorities.”

“Then why pretend to your students that these monsters don’t exist?” asked Alison.

“Because the truth would only increase the trauma in the world, not help stop predators that authorities are doing their best to stop.” said Claudia.

Alison grimaced. “Okay, so I’m going to go now.”

“Good luck.” said Claudia.

Alison left the lecture hall and passed a tall, slender, ginger Vligury woman, in a leather jacket and jeans. The ginger smiled at Alison as Alison fled past her.

“I’m on my lunch break.” said Claudia as she packed up her belongings.

The tall ginger woman grinned. “How convenient? I was just about to suggest I buy you some. My name is Amelia Hurst and I am an expert on Silfs over at Demirthfords in Shlattensberg.”

“You lecture at Demirthfords?” asked Claudia, impressed but doubtful.

Amy pulled out her purse and showed off her lunch card. “We have Mermaid on the menu.”

“Mermaid?” asked Claudia.

Amy grinned. “Are you a cock or a clit woman?”

“I’m a vegan.” said Claudia.

Amy giggled, stowing the purse. “We have Spriggan Roast.”

Claudia stared. “What’s the catch?”

“I want your advice on a dream.” said Amy.

Claudia thought for a moment then let out a long breath. “Well, why not?”

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Amy stared as Claudia sat in the canteen and carved into a breast made of plant fibres.

“Something I have never understood is why Spriggans look so female and feminine?” said Amy idly as she picked at her cocks in batter.

Claudia laughed as she shoved a morsel of gravy covered Spriggan fibres into her mouth. “Because

Viorum Kaztif-tan thought themself very heterosexual and male when developing the Spriggan."

"I thought Viorum was non-binary?" asked Amy.

Claudia nodded then waved as she chewed on her mouthful. When she swallowed she explained. "Viorum's gender fluid. They've settled on non-binary and pansexual now but they've been masculine, feminine, straight, gay, ace, aro, mono, poly and every other point in between."

"I stand corrected." said Amy.

"You said you had a dream?" said Claudia pointedly before placing another morsel of Spriggan fibres into her mouth.

"Well when I say it was a dream that's more a rationalisation on my part." said Amy.

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36 hours earlier Amy was walking through the rain with a drunk young white man.

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"I was walking a friend home from the pub." explained Amy to Claudia.

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"I feel funny" said Amy's drunk friend.

"Of course you feel funny, Jason, I've been buying you Pass-Through Brandy the entire night." said Amy amiably. "Lets just get you home and into my cooking pot so that Rhyfelwr can have a nice casserole when xe comes round tomorrow."

"But I don't want to die." said Jason quietly.

"Hush now, of course you do." said Amy, like a mother comforting a distressed child. "You've told me all about how lonely you are and you have no job or prospects. It'll all be over soon and you'll enjoy dying, I promise."

Jason looked up at Amy, a pitiful and pathetic sight, desperation in his eyes. "Promise?"

"Yes, Jason, I promise." said Amy proudly then she kissed Jason on the forehead. "I am good at this, your meat will be sweet as honey you enjoy me killing you so much."

"Alright." said Jason and he made an effort to walk taller.

"Good boy." said Amy proudly, reaching an arm around his side and squeezing him compassionately.

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"And then she appeared." said Amy to Claudia.

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There was a blinding flash and the sound of a stammering Sh! as a fridge materialised before Amy and out stepped a beautiful, slender, white, blonde Vligury female in an emerald green suit.

Jason stared in awe.

Amy swallowed nervously, her right hand reaching for the concealed blade in her sleeve cuff.

The strange woman pulled a pistol from her pocket and shot Amy between the eyes.

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“She shot you?” asked Claudia between mouthfuls.

“Between the eyes.” said Amy with confidence. “At that distance she couldn’t miss.”

“What about your friend?” asked Claudia.

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Amy blinked, in the distance a wolf was howling.

Jason lay paralysed on the floor.

Amy called out to him. “Jason?”

No reaction. She knelt down and felt his pulse. Steady and strong.

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“Was there anything keeping him paralyzed?” asked Claudia.

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Amy felt his forehead and removed a bullet from his forehead.

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“He was dead?” asked Claudia.

“Not then, no.” said Amy.

“So can’t you ask him what he saw?” asked Claudia.

Amy shook her head.

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Jason exited the shower in Amy’s house. “But what about what happened tonight? What about that woman? What are we are going to do?”

“Don’t worry about it.” said Amy sweetly as she stroked his cheek. “That is for me to worry about,

not you.”

“Are you sure?” asked Jason nervously.

Amy grinned. “Positively. Now, get in the pot, there’s a good boy.”

Jason grinned and giggled.

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“He died later that night?” asked Claudia.

Amy nodded. “So I heard anyway. Suffocated on his own vomit.”

“Well don’t feel guilty.” said Claudia.

“I don’t.” said Amy. “But I do want to know if you have any idea what it might mean?”

Claudia shrugged. “Nothing that I can think of.”

“Could you have a think on it and let me know later?” asked Amy.

“If I think of anything I’ll be sure to let you know.” said Claudia.

“Cheers.” said Amy as she rose to leave. “Oh and one last thing, why was that girl staying behind to see you if I may ask?”

Claudia shrugged. “She thinks she’s caught the attention of an old school predator.”

Amy frowned. “Poor girl.”

“You better watch out.” said Claudia. “Next thing they’ll be coming for you.”

Amy nodded gravely. “True...”

Claudia asked. “What would you do if a predator was onto you?”

Amy shrugged. “I’ve always believed the best defence is a good offence.”

Claudia nodded thoughtfully and rose from the table. “Well thanks for the Spriggan Roast.”

“A pleasure dining with you.” said Amy.

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A week later Amy entered a coffee shop called Avons and joined the back of the queue.

Alison locked eyes with Amy.

Amy noticed the terror in Alison’s eyes but tried to be nonchalant. “I’ll umm- I’ll have an iced frappe latte please?”

“Who’s that for?” asked Alison, sticking to the script and smiling sweetly even as she screamed internally.

“Amy.” said Amy cheerily.

Alison wrote the name on the cup like she didn’t know it and went to serve the next customer.

Amy went to receive her iced frappe latte and locking eyes with Alison once again.

Amy sat and drank, watching Alison with quiet fascination. A tune rolled around her brain.

Itsy bitsy tiny bee... A buzz, buzz, buzz, why do you flee... It’s bitsy tiny bee... A buzz, buzz, buzz, why do you scree... Itsy bitsy tiny bee... A buzz, buzz, buzz, why won’t you accept me...

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The next week Amy entered a different branch of Avons. She went to order an iced frappe latte.

Alison locked eyes with Amy.

Amy’s eyes widened and her smile tightened but she gave out her order as though nothing were at all untoward.

Alison kept up the smiling and the flirting as per the script but inside she was screaming. ‘I am dead. I am dead. This woman is going to kill me.’

Amy received her drink, locking eyes with Alison once again.

The tune rolled around Amy’s brain as she received her drink and watched her prey flirt with the customers despite the terror that was no doubt coursing her veins.

Itsy bitsy tiny bee... A buzz, buzz, buzz, how do you get your honey so sugary... Itsy bitsy tiny bee... A buzz, buzz, buzz, will you give some of your honey to me... Itsy bitsy tiny bee... A buzz, buzz, buzz, or shall I come take it from thee...

*

The next week Amy entered a different branch of Avons and one again locked eyes with Alison. She ordered the same drink and they went through the same show of pretending not to know each other.
They locked eyes once more as Amy received her drink and Amy watched the moment Alison broke.

Itsy bitsy tiny bee... A buzz, buzz, buzz, what shall I tell your family... Itsy bitsy tiny bee... A buzz, buzz, buzz, how shall I cope without thee... Itsy bitsy tiny bee... A buzz, buzz, buzz, when I’ve had you for my tea...

Alison went over to Amy’s table with a cleaning cloth and a spray bottle. “Why are you following me?”

“Why are you following me?” asked Amy, outraged.

“I’ve relocated twice to avoid you.” said Alison.

“So have I.” said Amy. “Not my fault you always end up working where I head to.”

Alison glared at Amy, her nostrils flaring with anger. “My shift ends in two hours. I can talk then.”

“You want me to prove I’m not stalking you by waiting around your place of work for two hours?” asked Amy.

“I can’t talk, I’m on the clock.” hissed Alison, her face stuck in a rictus of subservient glee. “Be here in two hours.”

Itsy bitsy tiny bee... A buzz, buzz, buzz, you will like it in my belly...

Amy finished her drink, waited 7 and a half minutes then gave up and left.

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Alison’s shift ended and she left the store. She heard a cough and turned to see Amy checking her watch.

“You’re late.” said Amy, annoyed.

“And you left.” said Alison, angrily.

“Well forgive me if I didn’t feel like wasting an hour and a half of my life because a former student of mine decided I was stalking her.” said Amy angrily.

Alison stared. “You are incredible, you know that? Do you think I don’t notice the way you look at me.”

Amy sighed. “I’m a pansexual woman, I can recognise beauty when I see it, so sue me, I don’t go around stalking every beautiful girl I see. There are too many beautiful girls apart from anything else.”

Alison sighed. “Buy me dinner.”

“Pardon?” asked Amy incredulously. “First you have a go at me for coming onto you and then you want to have dinner with me?”

Alison nodded angrily. “Yeah, I’m a university drop out working in a coffee shop, you can buy me some dinner while we talk.”

“So we’re talking now are we?” asked Amy. “I just thought we were staring at each other silently while dying inside.”

Alison gritted her teeth. “Yes, we are talking and I will feel a whole lot more amenable to you once I have a plate of chips in front of me.”

Amy sighed. “Fine.” She turned from Alison. “I will buy you food but you are not having anything alcoholic.”

“Fine by me.” said Alison bitterly.

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They walked in a frosty silence, ordered, waited at the bar in the same frosty silence then they went to sit at a table and Alison dug into a pie and chips.

Amy had her own plate of chips that she picked at as she watched the young woman opposite her.

Alison sat back and sipped her kerat dlengar.

“Feel better?” asked Amy, a touch of compassion in her voice.

Alison nodded.

“Good...” said Amy quietly.

“You really left every time you saw me?” asked Alison.

Amy nodded. “I don’t like seeing someone I care about look at me with fear.”

“You care about me?” asked Alison doubtfully.

“I mentored you for two years.” said Amy. “Yeah, I care about you.”

“And it was completely by chance you wound up at my store each time?” asked Alison.

Amy nodded. “I swear on my boyfriend’s life.”

Alison breathed a sigh of relief. “Well I suppose it does make sense in a way, we both live locally and we both have certain needs that must be met by a coffee store.”

“Isn’t that like a thing in game theory?” asked Amy. “Two military computers that end up in a stale mate because they will always make the most logical and therefore predictable choice.”

Alison shrugged. “I was majoring in Mythology and the history of the Elder Gods...”

A minute passed and Alison pinched a chip from Amy’s plate.

“Alison?” asked Amy.

“Yeah?” asked Alison.

“You didn’t drop out because of me, did you?” asked Amy.

Alison blushed and sipped her drink.

“Oh, Ally, you didn’t have to do that...” said Amy as she reached out a hand across the table.

Alison looked at the hand dubiously.

“Well you kept looking to me when you described the Silfs and the toy girls, asking me to do

demonstrations of how all these pretty young girls would submit to the Elder Gods...” said Alison.

Amy groaned and raked her face. “I’m so sorry, I didn’t know, I did not know. I just thought you’d want to be included because you were the smartest person in the class and I didn’t want you getting bored.”

Alison blushed and waved Amy’s concerns away. “Don’t get me wrong, I liked it, I always liked it, but do you remember the lecture on devil worship?”

Amy stared into space for a moment then looked utterly mortified. “Oh shit.”

Alison whispered. “I have never been so wet in all my life as when you tightened that belt about my throat and told them that I was your body to wear like a glove and command at will.”

“I‘m so sorry...” said Amy with a quiet horror.

“I loved it.” said Alison with a bitter bark of laughter. “I adored the sensation of being completely at your mercy but then I noticed your apparent glee.”

Amy said emptily. “Well the class seemed to be going really well...”

“You really had no idea?” asked Alison.

Amy shook her head.

“You don’t want to own me or eat me or whatever?” asked Alison.

Amy burst out laughing then said. “Oh god, I’m so sorry, you’re really sweet but -”

“Fuck...” said Alison.

“You should go back on the course.” said Amy.

“With what money?” said Alison bitterly.

“I could pay?” suggested Amy doubtfully.

“No...” said Alison sincerely as she shook her head. “This is my mess, not yours.”

“I can’t just let you throw your life away because I was too dumb to how our sessions might be affecting you.” said Amy.

“I clean up my own messes.” said Alison earnestly.

“Then let me let you earn my help.” said Amy.

“What are you suggesting?” asked Alison doubtfully.

“No more musical coffee shops, you keep working there and I keep getting my coffees there.” said Amy. “You give me a good service, I’ll tip you well, you give me a bad service, no tip.”

“Seriously?” asked Alison.

Amy nodded. “And if I should happen to leave behind my lecture notes you can return them to me for an extra tip and if I should happen to receive an essay with my notes one day I’ll mark it.”

“Continue the course in my free time?” asked Alison with the ghost of a smile on her lips. “With you paying me?”

“Shame to let a mind like yours go to waste.” said Amy. “I mean you wouldn’t receive a qualification but I might be able to write up a letter of commendation.”

“What about the other modules?” asked Alison.

“I can be very persuasive when I want to be.” said Amy with a smile. “Give me a list of names, I’ll make sure their marking and lesson notes get to you.”

Alison smirked. “You know I asked Miss Green if she knew how to stop a predator and she said that if you can’t run from a predator you can always embrace their desire to make you consent.”

Amy laughed. “You still think I’m stalking you? I could just walk out of here and go back to my regular coffee shop, never to see you again.”

“Oh, don’t...” said Alison with half a smile.

“If you think I’m a predator why don’t you want me out of your life?” asked Amy.

Alison grinned. “Because when I first decided to contact you after running I was scared but now I get to continue my course, I get good tips -”

“For good service.” insisted Amy.

“And I get to tell Claudia the name of the person I thought was a predator because apparently the authorities don’t have a single lead...” said Alison.

Amy chuckled. “That’s a good one, that’s real good one. Although there is the small issue of your work coinciding with when she is at work and this coffee shop being too far away to get to her during lunch hour so I’ll have to go for you.”

Alison frowned. “Maybe you should go.”

Amy laughed, then leaned over and asked. “Did I really get you wet?”

Alison closed her eyes and in that moment she decided she really did not care if Amy was a predator. She wanted this woman in her life, she wanted to continue her education and she wanted the tips.

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The next week Amy turned up at the end of one of Claudia’s lectures again.

“Amelia, right?” said Claudia, as she gathered up her things. “You here about that dream?”

“No, actually.” said Amy with a friendly smile as she handed over a brown envelope. “I bumped

into that student of yours and managed to convince her to continue her studies..”

“Which student?” asked Claudia.

Amy was silent and stared at the half Elf Professor.

“I have a lot of students.” said Claudia, embarrassed. “And religion does rather tend to upset people...”

Amy said incredulously. “Alison Benchley. You know skinny, black, Vligury, smart as a monk, cute as a button.”

“Oh...” said Claudia, drinking the information in. “She’s still alive?”

Amy exploded, angrily. “Yes, she’s still alive, no thanks to you.”

Claudia was shocked, her mind reeling but Elves are unflappable. She realized immediately that there was a not insignificant chance this woman was the predator or worked with them. She very calmly started working out how to humanely kill this woman or escape from her if she had to.

“And she’s coming back to the university?” asked Claudia.

“Busy with work and obviously she’s very reluctant to return to the hunting grounds of her predator but I have managed to talk her into continuing her studies for the sake of her own education since I was one of her tutors.” said Amy.

Claudia nodded, purposefully displaying all the symptoms of Vligury shock. “Of course, of course. She didn’t tell you who the predator was by any chance?”

Claudia asked the question so casually and with such a distracted look in her eyes but she knew this was the moment Amy would try to kill her if she was going to.

“No...” said Amy with a dissatisfied shrug. “She just said ‘He will know if I tell anyone.’”

Claudia almost rolled her eyes. Did this girl think Claudia was born yesterday? Obvious red herring is obvious red herring in news shocker.

“Well, we best be very careful.” said Claudia. “There are a lot of men at St Godwinson’s.”

Amy nodded. “You knew didn’t you? I mean that’s why you warned me I might be next?”

Claudia said as sincerely as she could through a filter of underplayed shock and horror. “Yes, such a beautiful young thing... Be careful.”

Amy blushed and bowed her head. “Well I’ll be stopping by to pick up lecture notes and work assignments for Alison, if that’s okay?”

Claudia nodded. Now the shock and terror was real and she couldn’t speak as Amy left. Great. Flirting with a super predator. Thank the gods Veganism was no longer discriminated against under law.

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Amy turned up at Alison's coffee shop with a brown envelope and laid it on the counter ostentatiously as she ordered.

"You know we're not allowed to accept bribes and it is actually illegal to try and buy the staff." said Alison with half a smile.

Amy grinned. "Oh, I don't pay for girls."

"Is that right?" asked Alison with a smug grin. "And would you like anything extra with your frappe late today?"

Amy licked her lips in anticipation then whispered. "Not here."

Alison laughed.

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Months passed and Alison and Amy's relationship thawed into an almost genuine friendship. Or as honest as a predatory older tutor manipulating a younger student into liking them can be.

They were out at the pub drinking late one night when Alison asked. "So do you really like me?

Amy could handle her drink far better and was far more reserved. "Of course."

"But like 'like like'? Like sexually? Like romantically?" asked Alison.

Amy frowned. "I'm your tutor, Alison. Relationships like that require equality of agency."

"Not necessarily." said Alison, her speech almost slurred. "Love is just an emotion. Like anger or happiness. It comes and it goes and it gives no shits if something is healthy or not. I know that there's an imba- imba- a wibbly wobblyness to the power of our relationship but I like you."

Amy chuckled. "You're drunk, Alison, you can't consent to anything right now."

"I know..." said Alison. She grinned as she looked hungrily at Amy. "But that first time you walked into my shop I thought you were going to kill me."

"Not this again." said Amy quietly.

"No. Listen. This is important." growled Alison. She leaned over the table and glared at Amy. "When I first saw you I thought you were going to kill me but I stayed."

"We've been over this..." said Amy with quiet sincerity.

Alison giggled. "Oh, bless you. You think -You think- Amy, I don't care."

Now Amy was paying attention.

"When you walked into the coffee shop I thought you were going to kill me and yes you had all these reasons I was to trust you but I didn't believe them. Not really." said Alison with a smirk. "I stayed because I like the bait, I like the trap you put me into and I like you."

Amy said. “Alison, I would never lie to you.”

Alison laughed. “That’s not the point. I’m not accusing you. I’m saying I accepted despite thinking that I was accepting the care of a farmer. If I can choose friendship despite thinking you my butcher, I can definitely choose friendship despite you being my tutor and if I can choose friendship -”

“Hush...” said Amy.

Alison fell silent.

“I think when you’ve finished that drink we can take you home to bed.” said Amy.

“Yes, Miss.” said Alison.

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That night stuck with Amy but Alison didn’t seem to remember it and Amy had no wish to remind her. For the first time in a long time in Amy’s life she began to consider the possibility of allowing someone into her life who really accepted who Amy was. It didn’t stop Amy quietly shaping Alison to her tastes, recommending her diets and exercise regimes that would improve her flavour, music and media that would make her more amenable to Amy’s designs upon her. Amy may have been delaying the plan but she was not scrapping it.

Then Alison had a week where she struggled with rent.

They were in a gastropub, Alison ate a salad while Amy ate chips.

“So yeah I’m going to be a bit late with my assignments.” said Alison. “And living on food banks.”

“Can’t you get a government loan to help you through?” asked Amy.

“No point. I’ll be paid by the time the paperwork’s cleared. Just going to be a hard month.” said Alison.

“Well I can feed you.” said Amy. “I’m an excellent cook.”

Alison glared at Amy.

“What? I am.” said Amy defensively.

Alison chuckled. “I’m not arguing with your culinary abilities. I’m just not sure it’s fair on you for me to ask you to cook for me.”

Amy grimaced. “I’ll tip you then. Big tips. Big big tips.”

Alison laughed. “You already are. You’re paying me to do the course you’re paid to teach.”

“Well, I can’t just let you starve.” said Amy frustratedly.

“Well, why not?” asked Alison.

‘Because it would spoil the meat.’ Amy most definitely did not say. Instead she just sulked.

“I don’t know why you’re upset. It’s my problem.” said Alison laughing.

“You’re my friend.” said Amy obstinately.

“I thought relationships required parity?” said Alison with a grin.

Amy sat up at that. “What are you saying? You don’t like me?”

Alison laughed and brushed the hair from her face. “I like you a lot, Amy. I like you far more than I think you are willing to accept but you keep yourself at a distance and I respect that.”

“Well, there’s things you don’t know about me.” said Amy.

Alison stared at Amy.

Amy squirmed in her seat, clearly uncomfortable. “Look, I hold a lot of power over you and I am teaching you things so it just would not be right to pretend that we are equals.”

“My brother David fantasies about being eating by giants.” said Alison seriously. “People get aroused by all kinds of impolite things. I’m not saying that we have to have a relationship of equals, I’m not saying that I need to know your secrets and I am not for one moment saying that I expect anything from you. All I am saying is that I find you very attractive and I am more than happy to enter into an imbalanced relationship with you. You can have all the control, you can stop it and start it and decide just how far things go. If you want me, you can.”

Amy stared and the words. “God, I would love to have you for dinner...” crossed her lips.

“When?” asked Alison.

Amy looked terrified. “Did I say that out loud?”

Alison stared at Amy.

Amy’s face flushed pink with embarrassment.

A smile crept across Alison’s face. “Oh, you meant that kind of dinner?”

Amy groaned and closed her eyes from embarrassment.

“The answer is still yes, by the way.” said Alison with a grin.

Amy stared at Alison, horrified. “What?”

“Look, if you have no idea what I’m talking about then I entirely apologise and all my doubts will be absolved tonight when we do eat. If you do know what I’m talking about though then don’t panic, I know what I am consenting to and I understand if you wish to accelerate your plans for me somewhat. There is no pressure or concern. I will tell no one and I will go to your house tonight, willingly.” said Alison soothingly.

Amy swallowed and looked down at her chips with nervous resentment.

“We can wait until you’re hungry again.” said Alison with a friendly smile.

Amy scowled.

Alison giggled.

“Come home with me.” said Amy quietly. “Tonight.”

Alison nodded.

“I do -” Amy frowned, not finding the words.

“We can talk tonight.” said Alison compassionately.

“I thought I was supposed to be the mistress here.” said Amy irrittably. “Now I can’t even bloody talk.”

Alison grinned. “Has anyone ever told you you’re cute when you’re flustered?”

“No one who’s lived.” said Amy with a scowl.

Alison winked.

Amy stared.

*

Amy walked Alison back to the coffee shop then headed home and started calmly preparing a candle lit dinner for two and a prepared the ingredients for another recipe.

*

5 hours later Amy was waiting outside Alison’s coffee shop, in a stunning layered suit.

“You’re late.” said Amy with concern in her voice.

“There was a special promotion to tie in with a cartoon.” said Alison by way of explanation. “Amazing how fans can be so obsessive over a limited run snack when there are plenty of identical alternatives.”

Amy nodded. “Well I’d like to buy you a dress before dinner.”

Alison smiled. “Aww, of course. Got to look my best if I am gracing your table.”

Amy stared at Alison and bit her lip with frustration.

“Mistress, may I kiss you on the cheek?” asked Alison.

Amy nodded.

Alison kissed Amy on the cheek then said. “I’d also like to hug you occasionally, maybe run my hands through your hair?”

Amy glared at Alison.

“I’ll take that as a no.” said Alison.

Amy started walking.

Alison followed her.

*

Alison stood before a full length mirror, wearing an emerald green dress and emerald green cut glass heeled shoes.

“Beautiful...” said Amy, shocked as she looked at Alison.

“I’m not sure, I think I’d like to try out the pink.” said Alison.

“No, the green suits you.” said Amy as she came up behind Alison. “Green is the colour of magic and life. It is the colour of the galactic sea and the colour of the Farsh-nuke’s eyes.”

Alison grinned. “When I look at myself through your eyes, I see the beauty.”

Amy approached Alison and whispered. “May I kiss you in the lips? May I use tongue?”

Alison kissed Amy on the cheek then said. “My Mistress does not have to ask if she wants to enjoy me.”

“Shut up, yes I do.” said Amy indignantly before she kissed Alison lightly on the lips.

“No, you don’t, I have already consented to giving you far more than my body tonight.” said Alison before she kissed Amy again on the lips, open mouthed.

Amy enjoyed the kiss then whispered. “May I run my hands through your hair? May I feel the contours of your body with my hands?”

“My Mistress, you may, and if you wish you my strip me and lick me, reach your fingers deep inside me or command me to lick you.” said Alison, the warmth of her breath tickling Amy’s ear.

Amy kissed Alison again and ran her fingers of her right hand through Alison’s hair while her left ran down her back, feeling the way the fabric bunched and rippled under her touch. “Oh, this is fucked up. This is so fucked up. You should run.”

“Not tonight.” said Alison, kissing Amy again.

Amy hissed. “I will destroy you.”

Alison felt her tongue meet Amy’s and she smiled, overjoyed at the feeling of finally tasting her Mistress, of finally being sexually hers.

Amy pulled back. “You don’t have to come home with me. I’ve already transferred money to your bank accounts. You can run. You can run and I won’t come looking.”

Alison shook her head and stroked Amy’s cheek fondly. “Take me your parlour and let me enjoy the sensation of your cooking.”

“What are we even doing?” asked Amy.

Alison giggled. “I think we’re having our first date.”

Amy swallowed nervously and went to speak again.

Alison kissed her.

Amy gave up and kissed Alison back.

An old dwarf woman asked suddenly. “May I help you at all?”

Amy leapt back a foot. “Umm, yes- Actually we would like to buy this dress.”

Alison nodded as she followed Amy’s lead. “Yes, it’s a very good fit and we’d also like to buy these shoes.”

The old dwarf nodded. “Very good. If you could just accompany me to the till.”

Amy nodded and started walking. “I’m paying, so...”

When she was left alone Alison pulled out her phone and checked her bank account. She stared at the figure, her eyes wide with shock.

*

Alison and Amy got off the bus and approached Amy’s house. Alison still wore the dress and shoes from the clothing store. Amy carried Alison’s old clothes in a big sports bag.

Amy watched Alison walk in the slippers nervously. “Are you sure you don’t want to change into your flats?”

Alison laughed. “I can walk this last mile.”

Amy groaned. “But what if you want to make a sudden get away? You won’t get far in those things.”

Alison reached her arm round Amy’s back. “I won’t be making any sudden get aways.”

Amy frowned and bit her lip.

“Look, it’s fine.” said Alison. “We don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do.”

Amy pulled out her keys from her pocket.

Alison examined the house they were approaching. The house was tall, thin, cream white with blue

tinted windows and orange roof tiles.

Alison smiled. “Quite fitting.”

Amy unlocked the door of the house then paused, the door open. She turned to Alison and whispered. “If you cross this threshold, you will belong to me and I will eat you.”

Alison smiled then kissed Amy lightly on the lips. “I know what I am doing and I consent entirely.”

Alison entered Amy’s house cheerfully.

Amy stared into space, confused. “That isn’t even how consent works.”

*

Alison entered the dining room. It was large and long. Tables stood folded away at the far side of the room with one small table fit for two placed in the center of the room. There were candles and a slim white vase containing a rose.

“It’s beautiful.” said Alison.

Amy smiled. “You belong here.”

Alison blushed and sat down.

“I’m going to go fetch a bottle of wine then put the starter on.” said Amy, immediately relaxed once Alison had taken her seat at the table.

Alison pulled out her phone and posted across to all her social media accounts:

I have gone hiking up near the Shaleigh Crags. It’s a retreat away from connectivity so I won’t be online for a couple of days. :)

Alison then turned off her phone, pulled off the back and extracted the battery.

Amy returned with a bottle of champagne and two flutes.

Alison presented the battery. “Do something with this.”

Amy stared. “Is that your phone battery?”

“I am half way up a mountain surrounded by high winds, choppy seas and all kinds of wandering murder hobos. I can’t use the internet and I don’t intend to for the next two days.” said Alison cheerfully. “Kindly dispose of my phone battery until you are done with me.”

“No. You put that right back in your phone right now.” said Amy sternly.

Alison stared at Amy. “Stop with the mind games. You know why I’m here and I know why I’m here. Ditch my cell phone battery somewhere I won’t think to look.”

Amy sighed, took the phone battery then left the room.

Alison took a sip of champagne.

Amy returned a moment later and sat down opposite Alison.

“How the fuck is it that I’m more scared that you are?” asked Amy.

Alison shrugged. “I know I won’t have to live with the consequences of tonight. You will.”

Amy looked Alison in the eyes. “I need you to understand what is happening here. I have been lying to you, manipulating you, stalking you and now I think I’m going to have to kill you. I am going to eat you.”

“I know.” said Alison with a smile before she took a sip of champagne.

“You know?” asked Amy incredulously.

“I thought I was supposed to.” said Alison with a shrug. “I mean you aren’t exactly a great liar.”

“I am though.” said Amy earnestly.

“I can believe it.” said Alison cheerily. “But not when it comes to me.”

“Yeah...” said Amy uncertainly then she sipped her champagne.

“Look, I really was just asking if you wanted to fuck me earlier today.” said Alison with a smile. “I just thought you wanted a date and then I realised you meant...” Alison shrugged.

Amy groaned and she raked her face. “And I just delivered a full fucking confession to you.”

“Yep...” said Alison with a smirk. “Still, look at the upside, got me to your dinner table in a nice dress.”

“Oh, you were always heading for my table.” said Amy with a smirk.

Alison grinned. “So what was the plan? Seduce me through the duration of my course than invite me round to celebrate my graduation?”

Amy frowned.

“What is it?” asked Alison.

“I am seeing someone.” said Amy flatly.

Alison giggled. “And that matters to us?”

“It does to me.” said Amy. “Consent and communication matters a lot to me, at least so far as relationships are concerned.”

“Ah...” said Alison wryly before sipping her champagne.

“Ah? What do you mean Ah?” asked Amy defensively.

“I mean you can play with your food but you can’t be unfaithful. If I’m just a snack being strung along then you can excuse the flirting and the conversations as part of being a good farmer but if I’m a student you’ve fallen for?” said Alison with a smile then she reached out across the table and squeezed Amy’s arm compassionately.

“I love my partner very much. We always eat together.” said Amy earnestly.

“Neat.” said Alison playfully. “I love threesomes.”

“They’re not coming.” said Amy, her voice almost breaking. “You are none of their business and mine alone to enjoy.”

“So I guess the big question is whether I’m just here for dinner.” said Alison.

“You would fuck me even knowing I’m going to kill you?” asked Amy, incredulously.

Alison shrugged. “You’re a very beautiful woman and, as a keen student of Silfs and the Farsh-nuke, I adore having a very dominant and powerful person to command me.”

“This isn’t BDSM, this is vampirism.” said Amy flatly.

Alison giggled.

“What?” asked Amy incredulously.

“You still think I’m going to suddenly wake up to how horrible this is.” said Alison with a smirk.

“Do you want to die?” asked Amy. “Is this suicide by stalker?”

“No.” said Alison. “This is hedonism by fetish and cold equations.”

“Aren’t cold equations about like shipwreck survivors drawing lots to see who dies so that others might live?” asked Amy.

Alison nodded. “A cold equation is an emotionless, pragmatic decision for the clearest amount of good in a terrible situation. I could spend my life running from you, live my life in fear of you and your siren call, except I tried that and I didn’t get very far and when I’m with you...”

Alison fell silent, her hands shaking.

Amy stared. “Oh, honey, I’m so sorry...”

Alison shook her head, took a sip of champagne then said. “When I am with you I feel more, I see more, I smell more. My whole body feels alive, I feel amazing when I am with you. The way you look at me, the way your fingers itch to be about me. You’re so calm and you are so reserved but there is a hunger about you and I can’t help feeling weak with exhilaration when it’s directed at me. I love every moment I am with you and five minutes alive with you will be better than a hundred years running from you.”

“I wouldn’t go after you.” said Amy sadly. “Not now.”

Alison laughed. “Especially now, Amy. Especially now. I’m too dangerous to allow to live.”

Amy closed her eyes. “I should have let you go. I’m so sorry, I should have let you go but I had you on the hook. I was so sure of it.”

“You did.” said Alison. She smirked despite a great sadness in her eyes. “You caught me entirely and you did it despite my knowing I was going after bait that would land me in a chip shop.”

Amy frowned. “I’m sorry. I like you a lot, Alison. I think that’s why I’ve drawn out the moment I ended our relationship so much.”

“So what are you going to do?” asked Alison. “How am I- How is this going to happen?”

“You won’t feel a thing.” said Amy. She smiled sadly as she sipped her own champagne. “You won’t see anything either. We will drink, we will laugh and you will go to sleep. Just go to sleep...”

“But after?” asked Alison.

Amy shook her head. “After is for me to worry about. You focus on trying to be happy.”

Alison laughed. “Be happy, she says.”

Amy smirked. “Well I think our starters should be about ready by now.”

“Oh neat.” said Alison. “What are we having?”

Amy said. “I was thinking some breast, a bit of rump and then finally some stuffing. Shall we go upstairs?”

Alison laughed as she followed Amy upstairs.

*

Alison woke up naked the next day under silk sheets. Amy was dressed in a suit, immaculate as ever.

“Hey honeybee...” said Amy sweetly as Alison stirred.

“Urgh! What time is it?” asked Alison sleepily then she snapped to alertness. “I’m not dead. Why aren’t I dead?”

“I don’t know.” said Amy. “We’ll talk later. You have to get to work.”

“So I’m coming back tonight?” asked Alison uncertainly.

“Yes.” said Amy flatly.

“Will you kill me?” asked Alison curiously.

“Perhaps.” said Amy. “I’m still thinking things through.”

*

Alison got halfway though her shower when she remembered. “Hold on, I specifically cleared two days so you could get rid of the evidence!”

“You agreed to take on overtime when one of your coworkers called in sick.” said Amy.

“Oh...” said Alison.

*

Alison finished work to find Amy waiting for her.

“Have you told anyone about me?” asked Amy.

“Of course not.” said Alison.

“You’re allowed to have some self preservation instincts.” said Amy irritably.

“I do but you bypass them because you’re just that good.” said Alison with a grin.

Amy laughed. “I hate that flattery works on me.”

Alison giggled.

*

Alison and Amy left the bus and walked to the house.

“So, does the barista outfit do anything for you?” asked Alison.

Amy snorted. “No, but you could wear anything and I’d like it.”

“What about if it was a really racist costume?” asked Alison.

“Okay, well, that would be bad, but you’d still work it damn well despite the bigot signalling.” said Amy.

Alison giggled.

Amy unlocked the door and they walked inside.

*

“Head upstairs, have a shower and change into what I’ve left on the bed for you.” said Amy.

“Yes, Mistress.” said Alison eagerly as she ran upstairs.

“And afterwards I’m taking you to the abattoir.” said Amy.

Alison’s laughter echoed down the stairs.

*

Alison stepped out of the shower and found the same dress from the store that she had worn last night but this one was in hot pink. Alison smiled and got dressed.

*

“You were right.” said Amy when Alison met up with her again. “Pink does suit you.”

Alison grinned. “This is really sweet but I need to know, why aren’t I dead?”

“I will answer your question.” said Amy. “But I can’t just tell you the answer without explaining a little of the context and my thought processes or you won’t understand.”

“Well I’ve followed you this far.” said Alison with a smile.

“Yes, you have.” said Amy proudly. “Now come into my abattoir, I have something to show you.”

Alison bowed her head in obedience.

They headed over to a book case and Amy tipped back Red Dragon by Thomas Harris. There was a click and the bookcase swung back to reveal a set of stairs that headed down.

Alison followed Amy inside and found an industrial looking place filled with barrels and vats. Various knives and medieval looking instruments on pristine clean racks and trays, needles and syringes and there, in a corner of the room, was a wipe clean metal chair with straps. Before the metal chair was a leather armchair and a mini fridge upon which sat a copy of the St James edition of the Silfavorecon.

“That’s where I kill them.” said Amy quietly.

Alison went to sit in the metal chair and noted that the chair was bolted down to the metal floor. “There’s straps. You said I’d feel nothing. Why do you need straps if I’d feel nothing.”

Amy shrugged and fell with practised confidence into the armchair. “No person’s biology is entirely identical, sometimes they wake and bodies can twitch as they die. Muscle spasms.”

“And the drips?” asked Alison.

“I’m a vampire thrall, I like blood. I pump it out and pump slaughter saline in. Keeps the body alive long enough to harvest what I can from them.” said Amy.

Alison nodded. “You use every part of the animal. I approve.”

Amy nodded. “Like this chair.”

Alison stared. “That’s not a wooden frame is it?”

“I carve screws and nails from the finger and toe bones.” said Amy.

Alison clearly looked a little disgusted. “What a resourceful woman you are.”

“This is who I am.” said Amy coldly. “This is what I am. I am not your adorkable stalker with a crush and a heart of gold, as fucked up as even that would be.”

“I know...” said Alison quietly.

“Do you know why I didn’t let you see the abattoir last night?” asked Amy.

“Because you wanted to fuck me and it would spoil the mood?” suggested Alison.

“Because it would spoil the meat.” said Amy coldly. “That is what you are to me, that is what every Vligury is to me. Meat. I am the farmer and I will raise you for the table, husbanding you through the darkness until the time comes when I am ready to harvest you.”

Alison was silent for a long time then said. “You aren’t going to eat me though?”

“I’ve thought about just killing you.” said Amy angrily. “I have considered just killing you and disposing of your body so I never have to think about you ever again.”

“Then why haven’t you?” asked Alison. “Why aren’t you killing me? I was prepared to die last night, I can die for you today.”

Amy grimaced. “That’s the fucking problem. I can’t kill you and I don’t want to, not really. I want you to submit to me, I want to own you and I hunger for your flesh but I like you. You are one smart lamb in a world of very stupid sheep.”

“So what happens now?” asked Alison.

Amy laughed. “I should kill you. Logically, you need to die.”

Amy reached her right hand inside her jacket.

Alison said. “I could do it myself, if you like. Just leave me alone down here and I’ll solve the problem for you.”

Amy pulled out a brown envelope. “I spoke with my partner. They’re in the process of applying for citizenship of Shlattensberg. Once they’re here we intend to get married and well, after I failed to kill you last night, we agreed that you will be our honeymoon treat.”

Amy handed the envelope to Alison.

“You’re saving me for the honeymoon?” asked Alison as she opened the envelope.

“It’s still undecided whether we’ll actually kill you or just use you for sex. They are a lot more okay with this than I thought they might be.” said Amy.

Alison felt inside the envelope and found a set of keys. “What does this mean?”

Amy laughed bitterly. “It means, my dear Alison, that I am asking you to move in with the woman who tried to kill you last night and has been murdering people for decades.”

“Decades?” asked Alison doubtfully. “I mean I know you are older than me but you must be like 35 at most?”

“I’m over 7000 years old.” said Amy casually. “I travelled with a man called the Gardener and got

dumped at the creation of the Mundis Turpis."

Alison stared.

Amy grinned. "Lets just say being a Vampire Thrall has its advantages and leave the topic there for now."

Alison laughed. "You're a cougar."

Amy glared at Alison. "Watch it. I'm not sure I can trust you yet and you're still sitting in my chair."

Alison grinned. "Well you could still harvest from me, just take a little of my blood every month."

Amy smiled. "That's a very sweet of you to offer."

"Well, you can make blood sausage? We can enjoy a meal made from me togeth-" Alison cried out as a thought occurred to her. "Oh my gosh!"

"What?" asked Amy.

"I've just considered another source of blood I could give every month." said Alison.

Amy burst out laughing.

Alison gabbled excitedly. "Okay but like it's got to be nutritious because it's lining for -"

Amy glared at Alison.

"Sorry, Mistress." said Alison.

"You are too perfect." said Amy with a smirk. "You sit in my slaughter chair the night after I tried to kill you and you're offering me your periods?"

Alison giggled.

"I've broken you, haven't I?" asked Amy with a smile.

Alison couldn't speak for giggling but she held out thumb and forefinger a centimeter apart.

"Well, come on, my broken thing, lets go enjoy you in my bedroom." said Amy as she rose from the armchair.

Alison giggled as she rose from the metal chair.

*

The next day Alison finished work and was greeted by a young white male Vligury in a tuxedo. He coughed politely. "Miss Benchley?"

Alison nodded as she approached.

“Miss Hurst sends her apologies for not being able to walk you home and hopes the following will suffice as compensation.” said the man as he pulled out a golden envelope and handed it to Alison.

Alison opened the envelope and found a debit card in the name of an A Hurst, the pin was included on a post it note stuck to the card that said.

By yourself some nice clothes.
A. H.

So Alison went to the shops.

*

When Alison finally returned to Amy’s house the moon was high in the sky. She unlocked the door and let herself and her many bags in.

Alison called out. “Mistress, your food has arrived!”

The sound of laughter guided Alison to a room on the second floor with a locked door. She knocked on the door and announced. “Fresh and hot, right to your door!”

Amy opened the door. She was wearing short jeans and a sleeveless vest. Her long flame red hair was tied back in a pony tail. She was also covered in pink paint but Alison was a bit too distracted to notice at first.

“Don’t tease me like that.” said Amy angrily. “You know how I hunger for the taste of you.”

Alison giggled. “Call it a perk of falling in love with a Vampire Thrall.”

“I see you took full advantage of my debit card.” said Amy, noting the bags.

“You lied to me, manipulated me and you want to eat me. Yes, I accepted your gift and made maximum frivolous use of it.” said Alison.

Amy chuckled then stepped back. “You’d better come in, this is your room after all.”

Pink. That was the thing Alison noticed first. The next was cushions. The third was sex toys. There were an awful lot of sex toys.

“Is this your idea of subtly asking to peg me?” asked Alison.

Amy laughed then said. “Oh, honey, I will peg you but these are your sex toys. You are my sex toy.”

“Mine?” asked Alison. “What do you mean these are mine?”

Amy said simply. “This is your room, your safe space from me.” Amy darted forward to give Alison a tour. “A wardrobe with full length mirror so you can get dressed for your nights out. Your own personal fridge and freezer so you don’t have to worry about accidentally eating people and -” Amy moved aside a painting of The Great Red Dragon And The Beast From The Sea to reveal a safe with a three digit code. She opened it to reveal a rack of guns. “I got you your own personal anti-Vampire Thrall armoury.”

Alison laughed.

Amy turned to Alison and held her by the shoulders. “I will eat you, Alison, but when I do I want you to accept my loving slaughter with good grace and enthusiasm. I never want you to be scared of me, not any more.”

“So you bought me guns?” asked Alison doubtfully.

Amy smiled. “I got you the license as well and I will train you to use them, as well as how to swing a sword, use a dagger, fire a bow and cast a magic spell.”

“Do you want to turn me into a weapon?” asked Alison.

Amy snorted then shook her head. “No, honey, I want you to be a harmless, beautiful, amusing sex toy. I want you eating and drinking what I ask so that you will be perfect for the day I do kill you but you deserve a life free from fear. You deserve to be able to protect yourself and you deserve to kill me dead if my lust for your body prevents me from asking for it nicely and taking no for an answer.”

“I can say no?” asked Alison doubtfully. “You’d let me?”

Amy smiled sadly. “You’re not like other Vligury. You deserve my respect.”

“But what have I done?” asked Alison doubtfully. “Why do I deserve to live over everybody else?”

Amy shrugged. “I like you. You matter. And it’s only a small stay of execution.”

Alison chuckled. “Yeah, you say that now but I’m going to be 80 and you’ll still be promising me my death will come soon.”

Amy laughed then she sat back on the bed. “So...”

Alison reached into a bag and pulled out a bikini.

“It’s green.” noted Amy. “I thought you liked pink.”

“Yeah but I know you like me in green.” said Alison as she sat on the bed beside Amy.

Amy pulled out a key and gave it to Alison. “This is the only key to your room. I want you to feel safe here so I will never enter without knocking and being told I can enter. I’ve soundproofed the walls so you can have deniability about my crimes and you are allowed to bring whatever friends or sexual partners back here and I won’t judge, nor will I predate upon them.”

“You’re really trying super hard to make a relationship based on you stalking me okay, aren’t you?” asked Alison.

Amy laughed. “I am so pathetic.”

Alison snuggled up with Amy. “No, I like it. You’re trying.”

“This is so fucked up.” said Amy. “Killing people is killing people but relationships are about

equality.”

Alison nuzzled Amy’s chest and said. “One thing to consider is that if you didn’t like me I probably wouldn’t be alive would I? And if I didn’t like you?”

Amy sighed then she cleared the hair from Alison’s forehead and kissed her.

“Do you think you love me?” asked Alison.

“I think what I feel for you defies conventional explanation and probably isn’t healthy at all but I didn’t kill you and that has to mean something.” said Amy.

Alison giggled. “Imagine explaining that on our golden anniversary.”

Amy snorted then she asked. “Do you love me?”

“I don’t know.” said Alison quietly as she hugged Amy. “You are so scary and I know you could snap me like a dry twig.”

Amy gently cleared the hair from Alison’s neck then started massaging her neck and shoulders.

“I think there’s a part of me convinced I am playing you.” said Alison quietly. “That I somehow think that if I say these words and I smile and laugh that you won’t want to kill me. I think sometimes that I am convinced I hate you and I am your victim entirely.”

“Close your eyes.” said Amy quietly.

Alison closed her eyes. “I keep waiting for the moment you’ll snap and turn on me. I keep waiting for the moment my life ends.”

Amy gently eased Alison off of Amy and onto the bed. “Keep you eyes closed but keep talking, I am listening.”

“At the same time though, you were my tutor and I can’t help but look up to you and want to please you and when I’m with you I feel alive, like my every breath counts, and then you look at me or touch me and I am just lost in warmth and I know that nothing else can touch me.” said Alison.

Amy said quietly. “I think you deserve to know a little of why I care about you, such as I can glean myself.”

Alison felt Amy’s weight on the bed again.

“Do you know much about the Silfavorecon?” asked Amy.

“I know what you and others have taught me.” said Alison, still with her eyes shut. “I know that it is a mythological document said to give instructions for recipes said to help men dominate women and make women subservient.”

“Yes, that’s what we teach about the Silfavorecon.” said Amy. “We focus on the effects and the rules and the tangible political statements but I’d like to read from the book of the Nothingness if I may?”

“May I open my eyes?” asked Alison.

“No...” said Amy gleefully. “Listen and imagine.”

Alison lay back on the bed and grinned. “Mistress...”

Amy cracked the spine of the book then read.

*

Excerpt from the Book of the Nothingness -
The St James edition of the Silfavorecon.

I wondered the nothingness as a cloud wanders the skies. I don’t think I had a gender then and certainly no agenda. I had been created during the chaos of the early nothingness when logic was still evolving the concept of universes. I was a bubble of primordial glitchy logic in a vast empty desert free of logic. Looking back I feel it is certain that I was suffering from the psychological effects of having no way to shut off my senses to the chaos of the evolving early multiverse.

I was an empty scarred ghost wondering the vastness of the nothing, for lack of anything better to do, and then I saw her.

I know that this moment must be a moment people expect to be massively important and it was to me and her but it was not what you think. This is called the Silfavorecon after all. You would expect the first woman I encountered to be the platonic ideal of Silfness.

She was lost. She was angry. She was distraught. She was also old. For a Vligury at least. But she was skinny, white and very much a woman. Not that any of that mattered to me back then.

“Excuse me!” She called out. “Can you help me!? I’m looking for my children!”

I floated over and explained that I had seen no children.

“But they must be with me.” said the woman. “They were in the car with me when I died. This is the afterlife is it not?”

“No. Nothing here ‘cept me and six others.” I said.

“I am Lucy Danse, I come from a place called Mundis Turpis, the World Fish. Who are you and what is this place?” asked the woman.

“I am known as the Farsh-nuke for it is what sounded when I was formed.” I said. “This is the Great Green Nothingness because because it is great, green and full of nothing in particular.”

“Then where did I come from?” asked the woman. “Can I get back there?”

“I doubt it.” I said. “If you are here and you think you died, it must be that the logic bubble you came from accidentally moved your soul here instead of deleting it when you died.”

“So my kids?” asked the woman.

“Gone.” I said. “Or else alive and mourning their mother where you come from.”

The woman went very quiet then said after a long moment. “Kill me.”

“With what?” I asked. “I am a ball of sapient pseudo logic, I have no way to hurt you.”

The woman looked around at all the nothingness then said. “If you are a ball of logic, incorporate me into your code, absorb my soul into yourself.”

I thought for a long moment. What she asked was not impossible. I had absorbed proto-universes I had touched before. “Okay, but are you sure?”

The woman stared at me. “My kids are dead, I am dead and I am lost, alone in a vast emptiness with only a cloud of logic for company. End my existence. It will be a mercy. Please.”

*

“And so I absorbed her.” read Amy from the Silfavorecon. “I let this desperate lonely woman make contact with my skin and I tasted of her soul. I tasted of her childhood and the cruel tyranny of sexism upon her identity. I tasted of her loves and woes. I tasted of her sinew and muscle, the blood in her veins and the bile in her stomach. I tasted of a life spent fighting for truth and justice. I tasted of beauty, glee and anger. I tasted of the power and wonder of this woman and I thought it good.”

Alison smiled.

“In that moment I knew I was absolutely nothing like her and her kin but that I wanted nothing more than to possess her and her kin. In that moment I knew I would have to search out others of her kind and compel them to let me possess them as I had possessed Lucy’s soul.” read Amy.

There was a thud as Amy shut the book. “I never knew what the Farsh-nuke meant until I had you at my mercy, naked in my slaughter chair. In that moment Alison, I had you utterly, you were ensnared at the center of my web and I was so ready to devour you.”

Alison stayed quiet.

“And then you moved.” said Amy quietly. “It wasn’t much. Just a small subtle turning of the head. You were so drunk you wouldn’t have felt a thing but here you were, at my mercy, about to have the life drained from you, and you were snuggling down and getting comfortable...”

Amy looked down at Alison and smiled. “In that moment I understood why the Farsh-nuke became a monster. He met the perfect woman and he only knew it in the killing of her. I am fortunate I realised before things went too far. I am fortunate that I realised how rare and wonderful you are before I wasted that on one selfish meal.”

Alison blushed. “Why do I like you, Mistress? Why do I feel aroused by your hunger for me? Why couldn’t I fall for a harmless Elf or Dwarf?”

Amy laughed then gently pat Alison on her cheek. “Because sometimes good things happen to bad people.”

“Can I open my eyes yet?” asked Alison.

“Yes.” said Amy with a grin.

Alison opened her eyes then sat up beside Amy. “So are you actually going to teach me how to fire those guns?”

“Of course.” said Amy.

“Well lets start with the naming of things.” said Alison.

“Alright...” said Amy as she rose from the bed. “Now lets say you want something impressive that can scare the fuck out of someone, gore them badly if you have to...”

Amy pulled a large shotgun from the cabinet. “This is your set of antlers. You wear it in an open carry state, you use the large and ostentatious sights, you cock the safety off and then you rack it. The racking does nothing. - Absolutely nothing. - But it’s loud and impressive and a million movies have trained people that racking means shit is about to go down. It’s empty so check out the weight and feel.”

Alison accepted the shotgun. “Why antlers?”

Amy smirked. “We can talk TV shows later...” She pulled out two pistols. “Now these are decorative but discreet, they are your tusks. You carry them with you always, you never rely on them but if a predator comes at you, a pair of tusks in his face should do enough damage to put that fool down.”

Alison put aside the shotgun and accepted the pistols. “When you say they’re decorative is that you saying you’d like me to wear them.”

Amy grinned. “Well sexy female historians who dual wield do have a certain timeless aesthetic appeal...”

“Noted.” said Alison with a smirk.

“Now lets say you’re facing a monster in a position of power and authority, you need something that is simple, practical, reliable and with a long history of killing fascists.” Amy pulled out a sub-machine gun. “This is the guillotine. Typically has ammunition clips inserted from the bottom but it can be fed rounds from a chain that are worn about the body until time of use. All you have to do is aim and place your finger on the trigger, as you fire the explosion will pull the next round into the chamber.”

“Am I ever likely to need to use the guillotine?” asked Alison.

Amy shrugged. “Ideally you won’t have to use any of these. I would rather you remained my precious innocent flower but I’d rather you a killer than dead or abused by someone other than me. Once I’ve trained you you’ll wear the pistols outside the house and the shotgun on your back if you visit an open carry state.”

“What if I go somewhere guns aren’t allowed, like Obtland?” asked Alison.

Amy grinned. “Well that is what the martial arts, alchemy and witchcraft is for.”

“Witchcraft?” asked Alison dubiously. “You can really do that?”

Amy giggled.

Alison looked at Amy hungrily then bit her lips.

“What is it?” asked Amy.

“I was just wondering if you had a cauldron and then I wondered if you would boil me in it and then it occurred to me just how cute you look when you show off your body.” said Alison.

“I was painting.” said Amy obstinately.

“Do you have a cauldron though?” asked Alison.

“Witches do not use cauldrons, that is media misrepresentation.” said Amy icily.

“Could you boil me alive though?” asked Alison.

“I’m not going to waste your meat like that.” said Amy testily.

Alison smirked. “Could you though?”

Amy sighed. “I have a Contravoxai cooking pot. They believe in making soups from live Vligury.”

Alison grinned then asked. “Is it big enough for two?”

Amy stared at Alison.

“Because you look really cute in that outfit and you do need a wash...” said Alison pointedly.

Amy closed her eyes, said. “I don’t deserve you.” then walked out of the room.

Alison stared at the empty doorway.

A second later Amy said. “Well, are you coming or not?”

Alison giggled and left the room.

*

That night Alison dreamed.

Alison lay naked and helpless within a sticky web of white silk.

Above her was a great red spider that spoke with Amy’s voice as it bound silk tightly about her. “Now don’t worry, my little Honeybee, I only wish to keep you safe.”

Alison gasped as a set of strands was bound tightly about her chest.

“I really just want the best for you, I do hope you understand that.” said the great red spider.

*

The days passed merrily as Alison worked during the day and came home for lessons in the proper use of weapons. The sex stopped being such an urgent and vital part of their time together once they realized they had nothing stopping them and life got in the way. Alison continued her studies and Amy had marking to do.

Then the lessons in Alchemy began.

“The first rule of Alchemy is always correctly label and measure your ingredients.” said Amy sternly, from the other side of a counter top containing a bunsen burner, test tubes and a pestle and mortar. “The second rule of Alchemy is ALWAYS correctly label and measure your ingredients. The difference between a love potion and a potion of internal combustion is failing to label and measure your ingredients correctly.”

Alison nodded then she asked. “Have you used a love potion on me?”

“Not yet.” said Amy with a smirk. “I rely on my natural charm and clever words. You fell for me because you like what I offer you and I am very good at manipulation. Not because of the chemicals in your brain.”

Alison nodded then she said. “You know you look very hot in a lab coat and protective goggles?”

“Down girl.” said Amy with a grin. “Today we are going to learn how to make a simple but effective knock out solution that can be dissolved into a person’s drink. With this you hopefully won’t have to actually kill me if you decide you no longer want to stay with me or otherwise decide I am a danger that needs to be put down.”

“I love how you aren’t even pretending that you’re teaching me skills I’ll use on other people.” said Alison gleefully.

Amy shrugged. “Most people are abused or assaulted by people they know.”

Alison stared at Amy, incredulous.

“So, ingredients...” said Amy, moving right past that awkwardness.

*

Alison dreamed again.

“This is for your own good.” said the great red spider as she bound Alison with her silk. “You will be safer like this.”

The silk covered Alison’s mouth and nose.

Alison looked pleadingly at the great red spider.

The silk covered up Alison’s eyes and Alison felt the great red spider finish the cocoon.

*

It was another week before Amy was ready to introduce another subject to Alison.

Amy stood at the center of a seven sided shape drawn on the floor with what looked like salt. There were pieces of bloody flesh at each of the points along the septagon.

“Right, now there’s a prayer on the desk over there beside a necklace with a holy symbol on it and a wand. Put on the necklace, take the wand in your right hand, point it at me then read from the prayer.” said Amy.

“Why?” asked Alison.

“It’ll be fine, trust me.” said Amy.

Alison stared. “Trust you? You want to eat me! You expect me to summon Cthulu without asking questions.”

Amy laughed. “Okay, fair point, but this isn’t Cthulu you’re summoning. This is a warding ritual. It’s used by followers of Pacifus to trap and bind evil doers, which, well, I am.”

“You want me to perform a binding ritual on you?” asked Alison incredulously.

Amy grimaced. “No, honey, the point of this is that it will let you have communion with Pacifus and therefore grant you the magic of light and love. My soul is simply going to be offered as a bartering chip. You can either condemn me to hell or condemn me to redemption and heaven.”

Alison’s face lit up. “I can make you good?”

“Cosmically speaking, yes...” said Amy with considerable annoyance. “Look the point is that you will be able to talk with the good goddess, using me as a bargaining chip.”

“And you would do that for me?” asked Alison skeptically.

Amy laughed. “Honey, I sold my soul to the devil long ago. This is just offering myself up to Pacifus for an inspection of the goods.”

“Okay then...” said Alison as she put on the necklace, grabbed the wand and scanned over the prayer.

“Also, Alison, since well there’s a non-zero chance I might never see you again I want you to know that I think I might possibly, just a little bit, sort of, vaguely, love you.” said Amy.

Alison glared at Amy. “You want to eat me.”

Amy nodded. “Have you seen you?”

Alison looked to the prayer and said. “Quiet now. I have to talk to a goddess.”

Amy nodded and gave a salute. “Your majesty...”

Alison cleared her throat then read aloud. “Oh Pacifus, who art in heaven, I present before you the villain Amelia Hurst. She stands accused for the crimes of murder, defilement of the dead and vampirism. She stands now in a ward made from what could be found of the dead. We call upon you to pass judgement upon her very soul and decide whether we shall hasten her to death or condemn her to a long life before meeting her reward. I speak now in the names of Matilda,

Margaret, Lucy and Janet. Hear me and judge, oh wise and gentle beneficence."

Birdsong started up and a gentle breeze blew past as the warmth on a summers day hit Alison. She looked up and saw an artificial sun hovering above Amy and beating down upon her.

"Greetings my child..." said a woman sweetly.

Alison turned to see a middle aged slim and very beautiful dark skinned Vligury. Alison's mouth dropped and she stared.

"Does my appearance startle you child?" asked Pacifus.

"I don't suppose you're interested in BDSM at all?" asked Alison.

Pacifus chuckled and lay a hand upon Alison's shoulder. "It's very kind of you to offer, my child, I am not the deity you're looking for if you want someone to dominate you."

"I could always-" began Alison.

Amy coughed loudly.

Pacifus laughed. "Someone is jealous, I think. This one owns you, yes?"

Alison smiled sheepishly. "It's kind of complicated, she's definitely a monster and very probably deserves to burn in hell but I sort of like her. She arranged all this in the hopes you might grant me magic."

Pacifus grinned. "Now honesty like that is something I can respect."

Alison blushed.

"Tell me, if you could control fate would you walk away from this beast, or would you join her in hell?" asked Pacifus. "Would you be free of her and remain true to your values or would you join her in hell?"

Alison swallowed nervously. "No chance she can be made good?"

Pacifus looked to Amy, looked her in the eyes. "This one does not know does she?"

"No." said Amy quietly.

"And why not?" asked Pacifus.

Amy swallowed nervously. "Because I like her and I don't want her to leave me."

"Still this one manipulates you, my child, you should be wary of her." said Pacifus. "She will be your end."

Amy stared back at Pacifus, sullen faced.

"I don't care. It's what I want." said Alison.

Pacifus turned to Alison, with a big grin on her face. “I will grant you powers, if only so your Mistress on this plane does not teach you the arts of my opposite number. You would not like his terms. And hey if you can save the soul of your Mistress, so much the better. I do so hate the evil that men do to beautiful women.”

Then Pacifus was gone and Amy stood at the center of a room filled with seven naked young Vligury.

“Are they alive?” asked Alison.

“They’re naked Vligury in my basement so no, they are not alive.” said Amy firmly.

One of them stirred and rolled over onto their side.

Alison looked pointedly at Amy.

“Muscle spasm.” insisted Amy.

Alison folded her arms and tapped her foot.

“Go to your room and let me dispose of the bodies.” said Amy.

Alison stared at Amy.

“They’re dead.” said Amy firmly. “Their families have mourned them.”

Alison turned and left the room.

*

In her dreams Alison could feel herself dissolving inside her cocoon, skin and flesh melting as her brain, heart and lungs hung suspended in the soup of the cocoon.

*

The powers came slowly at first. It was like noticing a sound just on the edge of your perception. Alison could see life and vitality as an aura. It wasn’t blinding, it didn’t overshadow anything, it was just there on the edge of the periphery, a sense that could be focused on.

After a week of this Alison used the ability when she stubbed her toe by accident one day. Alison noticed that when she focused upon her pain a kind of slider opened up to her. It was like when she had gotten migraines in the past, focused on regulating her breathing and could feel the muscles in her head relaxing, letting the pain go. Except that as Alison focused on letting go of that pain, her hands glowed with a warm yellow light.

Alison told Amy about this and a week later she found herself ushered down to the basement.

A large trunk sat at the center of the room. Amy sat, wearing black leather trousers and a red leather jacket, atop the trunk.

“What’s going on?” asked Alison.

“Change.” commanded Amy.

“You know that just makes me more suspicious, right?” said Alison petulantly.

“This can wait, go change.” said Amy.

So Alison changed into jeans and a crop top.

“Good.” said Amy approvingly. “Then we can begin.”

“Begin what?” asked Alison nervously.

Amy rose from the trunk, opened it then looked down inside and placed a finger to her lips before pulling a young, skinny, white, Vligury male with long blonde hair from the trunk. He was wearing an emerald green bikini and his wrists and ankles were bound together with leather straps.

“This is Lindsay Cabbot, had an eye on him for sometime.” said Amy. “Family’s from Woyit, Eagernot, but he was raised in my home town. He grew up playing with my grand nieces. It was only a matter of time before I gave into temptation and seduced him. So, lets play a game.”

Alison stared. “Have you been cheating on me?”

Lindsay looked across the basement to the metal chair and realised his kinky hookup had gone very disastrously wrong.

Amy smirked. “No. I may have been eyeing him up as a replacement for you but I was thinking purely in monogamous terms, at least as far as Vligury sex toys are concerned, so...”

Amy slapped Lindsay on the arse. “I am going to hurt this by and you are going to channel your mystic healing powers.”

Lindsay looked up at Amy pleadingly. “Mistress, no... Please I’ve been a good boy.”

“And I’ve been very very bad, I know...” said Amy gleefully. “Alison, fetch me the whip from the corner.”

“I’m not going to let you torture the poor boy.” said Alison.

Amy nodded. “Sorry. You’re right, can’t do that if we’re going to eat him.”

“No.” said Alison. “You aren’t eating him.”

“Then fetch me my whip.” said Amy.

Alison sighed then went to one corner of the basement to fetch Amy’s whip before handing it to Amy. “When this is over we let him go, promise me we’ll let him go.”

“I promise you I will release him from further pain.” said Amy.

“Right...” said Alison doubtfully.

“Test one. Bruising to the arse.” said Amy.

“What!?” cried Lindsay.

Alison watched the whip crack.

Amy stepped aside.

Alison approached Lindsay. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m trying to help you.” Alison placed her hand on Lindsay’s butt cheek and focused on the pain, focused upon Lindsay’s life force, then gently, she eased the pain away.

Lindsay sighed with relief.

“Good...” said Amy, then she picked up a knife. “Test two.”

With each test the act of healing, the literal practice of it, grew easier, but summoning the energy to let the pain go away became harder and harder.

Lindsay survived the experience and Amy did her best to apologise and provide aftercare.

Lindsay had a shower and got to enjoy a vegetarian meal with Amy and Alison as they watched one of Amy’s favourite TV shows.

Alison could not help having noticed however that Amy kept offering Lindsay and herself alcohol so when Amy was distracted Alison poured her drinks away and kept a behavioural match with Lindsay.

“So like is he becoming the cannibal to catch the cannibal?” asked Lindsay after a while. “Because that’s kind of fucked up. I mean at a certain point wouldn’t straight up plugging the monster be the more moral thing?”

“I don’t know.” said Alison. “Perhaps he hopes that his friend can be redeemed once made safe?”

“Or maybe the killer is just that good?” said Amy with a grin. “You don’t ever want to let a killer into your head.”

Alison smiled sweetly at Amy. “Nah, no one’s that good.”

Amy giggled.

*

Sure enough Lindsay passed out and Alison seemed to pass out, half a sip later.

Amy carried Alison upstairs to her bed and stripped her naked before folding the sheets over her.

Amy locked the door then left the room.

Alison sprang lightly out of bed, unlocked the safe and pulled out a shotgun. She found the spare key she’d gotten cut and hid in the gun safe then unlocked her door, opened it, went outside and locked the door again. She darted swiftly and quietly down the stares and to the basement.

*

Amy sat in her armchair and was busily hooking Lindsay up to have his bodily juices drained while he sat strapped naked in the metal chair.

Alison racked the shotgun. “Killed by antlers, a fitting way for you to go I think.”

Amy groaned. “I should have bound you just to be on the safe side.”

Alison chuckled. “Because I certainly wouldn’t have noticed the marks the following morning.”

Amy said. “What do you want me to do, Honey? I can’t let him go. He’s a student and I kidnapped and tortured him.”

“How about not killing him and letting me talk to him?” said Alison. “We can ruin his reputation, make it so no one will ever believe him over you. You don’t have to do this. You didn’t have to do any of this.”

“You won’t pull the trigger, Ally, I know you.” said Amy softly as she rose from the chair. “You had the opportunity to turn me into the police, to report me to the school board. Maybe not enough to stop me or save you but enough to make your disappearance look suspicious.”

Amy turned to look at Alison. “I told you you don’t want to let a killer into your head, Alison. Well, I am your teacher, Honey, and your Mistress, I have burrowed deep into your head and you won’t pull that trigger.”

Alison frowned. “Maybe but do you know the dangerous thing about getting inside a person’s head? You expose yourself.”

Alison chucked the shotgun into the air then caught it by the barrel. “I got into your heart, Mistress, and I will gladly throw myself upon your antlers to save the life of another.”

“You won’t save his life.” said Amy bluntly. “He has to die.”

“Then you will have no one.” said Alison coldly. “Look me in the eye, Mistress, end my life.”

Amy stared. “I don’t have an answer. I can’t fix this. I kill and eat people, Honey, it’s what I do, it’s who I am.”

“Then find another way.” said Alison angrily. “Contact your dark gods, speak with shadowy contacts. Find a third way. I was willing to die for your pleasure and your anxiety. Do not think I will not die to save another.”

Amy stared at Alison. “Please don’t do this. Please, I beg you.”

“You tortured him in front of me, why the fuck should I let you kill him?” asked Alison. She slid her finger over the trigger. “I can do it for you if you like. Of course that would be the ultimate insult wouldn’t it? To take your love from you, spoil her meat and deny you the pleasure of the kill at the same time?”

“Fine...” said Amy after a long moment.

“Pardon?” asked Alison.

“You win, the boy can live.” said Amy.

Alison laughed. “Forgive me, if I don’t trust you.”

“Well what do you want me to do?” asked Amy.

Alison looked at where the trunk still sat in the center of the basement.

“No!” cried Amy incredulously.

Alison glared at Amy.

“Fine.” said Amy bitterly. “Fucking fine but if he consents I get to fuck him.”

Alison smirked. “I had first dibs.”

“Threesome?” suggested Amy. “Then we share him?”

“And if he objects?” asked Alison.

Amy smirked. “Honey, I talked you to my table and you talked me into letting the boy live. I have a feeling what he wants is very much down to us.”

“Get in the damn trunk.” said Alison.

“Okay...” said Amy as she approached the trunk.

*

Once Lindsay had left for his morning lectures Alison let Amy out of the trunk.

“I have some good news and some bad news.” said Alison. “The good news is that Lindsay is convinced we are a power couple into mind game domination and very much intends to keep seeing us for, as he put it, ‘Hurt/Comfort play’.”

“And the bad news.” asked Amy.

“He didn’t think anything had gone particularly wrong. He thinks he got too lost in the scene and misunderstood our game. He would never have gone to the police which means you absolutely did not need to kill him and I am never going to forget that.” said Alison cheerily.

“But he saw my basement.” said Amy incredulously.

Alison chuckled. “Apparently hardcore BDSMers can have sex dungeons that are very serial killer chic. He said the idea especially clicked into his head after our little conversation during the TV show. He thinks we’re hardcore roleplayers who like a victim to play cannibal and CHI agent with.”

Amy burst out laughing.

“In fact I think he heard our little show down because he had a dream about being on the dinner

table as the characters from the show debated about killing him and he found the dream particularly erotic.” said Alison.

Amy fell silent, face flushed pink.

“I’m going to going to go to work now. See if you can prepare another scenario for our plaything by the time I return.” said Alison.

Amy nodded and waved to Alison as she left then nearly ran to her bedroom.

*

As the months went past Alison continued her studies, learning more about the mythology of the multiverse, studying the Silfavorecon and learning to control the magic powers bestowed upon her by Pacifus Subis.

There was far more than just healing. Alison could sense thoughts of harm, anger or resentment. She could reach out with her soul and stop a weapon from striking a living thing. She could even prepare a barrier to mitigate damage before it occurred.

As for the Alchemy? Alison started keeping a herb garden and farmed spiders, bees, snails and mushrooms. She was still just making small stuff but acid, flash bangs, knock out gas and healing salves were all things she understood well now.

Lindsay proved a most willing test subject and fast became Alison’s best friend. Once the novelty of him wore off however both Amy and Alison stopped seeing him as a sexual thing and only saw their friend, or in Amy’s case, a particularly nice example of domesticated cattle. Amy particularly loved the way she could openly talk about how she intended to one day butcher Lindsay to Lindsay’s obvious enjoyment. For this reason Lindsay adopted Amy’s dietary suggestions eagerly.

*

“You know I’ve been thinking that we should eat Lindsay when my partner arrives back.” said Amy casually before plopping a grape into her mouth as she looked at Lindsay.

“You can’t say that.” said Alison. “Lindsay’s our friend.”

“No, no, let her talk.” said Lindsay, his face flushed red. “What were you thinking?”

“Well it’s actually an idea of Alison’s but I think it has merit in your case.” said Amy with a grin. “How would you like to be boiled alive, Lindsay?”

“Well I do love a good hot bath...” said Lindsay with a smile.

“Yeah, I’ve been thinking about the recipe for sometime.” said Amy. “Boil you with some herbs and vegetables. Maybe some stuffing inside of you.”

Lindsay giggled. “I do love a good stuffing.”

“You can’t.” insisted Alison.

“I think some blood sausage inserted deep.” said Amy, ignoring Alison. “Something to cook along

with Lindsay."

"I like it." said Lindsay. "I assume I'd need to be shaved before hand."

Amy nodded. "Waxed everywhere, save the head for presentation purposes."

Alison said. "Honey, you're not killing our friend."

Amy shrugged. "Well a foursome isn't exactly going to work is it? And my partner deserves a good meal when they arrive."

"I concur." said Lindsay with a smirk. "It is only right that a good wife have dinner on the table when her partner returns from travels in far off lands."

"And there is no meal so nourishing as that made from a lovingly raised meat animal slaughtered that very day." said Amy.

"I entirely agree." said Lindsay with a grin as he poured himself more wine. "And you have been a very good farmer, my dear. You have treated me firmly but fairly and let me dine at your table and so I shall gladly grace it in return."

Alison stared at Amy then said quietly. "Could I have a word, Mistress?"

*

Alison locked her bedroom door behind her then screamed. "What the fuck, Amy!? What in the name of the Great Farsh-nuke and the Holy Lucy are you cocking playing at?"

"Two ways to make cattle sweet when it dies." said Amy with a shrug. "You can prevent it seeing the blade or you can make it associate the blade with good things. Lindsay will think I am mind game fucking him when I kill him."

"You aren't killing him." said Alison angrily. "We talked about this, you are not fucking killing him."

Amy smiled then sighed. "Honey, I know that to you I am the spider at the center of the web but I am the submissive in my relationship. I have told my partner about you and I have told my partner that I am in love with you. It is possible that I will be allowed to keep seeing you but it is not certain, it is not even very likely, and it certainly isn't likely that I will be allowed to protect both you and Lindsay. Isn't it better that he dies happy and you live than that you both die?

"You find a third way." said Alison angrily. "I would rather we sent Lindsay away and I be the one who dies."

"Oh, I couldn't boil you..." said Amy earnestly. "You deserve to be cooked better than that."

"Then save our lives." insisted Alison.

"And if I can't?" asked Amy.

"If you can't, Lindsay goes on the run." said Alison.

“You think a man who will giddily discuss his own murder is going to outrun a person that scares even me?” asked Amy. “I’m not asking you to accept killing him. I’m just asking you to accept what he believes he is consenting to. That we boil him to within an inch of his life for my partner on their return, then I remove him from the soup and you heal him.”

“I heal him?” asked Alison incredulously. “That’s your third way.”

“At least enough so he doesn’t die. His flavour will infuse with the soup anyway.” said Amy. “Hopefully that display might be enough to showcase that he is cattle and not a challenge.”

“Wait...” said Alison. “Can you make meals that we can survive? That the injuries can be healed off?”

A hungry smile crossed Amy’s face. “How good are your healing abilities? Might you be able to regrow limbs?”

Alison stared at Amy then she asked. “Can you cut cleanly enough that if I can’t we can rush him to the hospital?”

“Why rush?” asked Amy. “We could take my van and travel with Lindsay right to the hospital.”

“We could go to prison.” said Alison.

Amy stared at Alison. “Honey, if this works I don’t need to kill ever again. I think it’s worth it, don’t you?”

Alison stared. “How the fuck do we convince Lindsay to let us cut his limbs off?”

Amy grinned devilishly. “You haven’t read much Thomas Harris have you?”

*

Amy carried Lindsay into the hospital between her arms. “There has been a terrible accident.”

Alison handed a cooler to the doctors in Accident and Emergency. “This is his leg. I hope we got here in time.”

As Lindsay was rushed off by the doctors Amy went to Alison’s side. “This is my fault, Alison. My stupid idea.”

Alison whispered. “I felt his pain, Amy...”

“I’m sorry...” said Amy, kissing Alison on the forehead.

“No, you don’t understand.” hissed Alison. “I felt his pain and I tried to push the pain away but it wouldn’t go away so in desperation I tried to push the pain in any direction in would go...” Alison’s mouth dried and she tried to summon up the words. “I made his pain worse, I heard him scream, I heard my friend, my good friend, scream and I - I thought it good.”

Amy kissed Alison tentatively on the lips.

Alison looked up into Amy’s eyes. There was no hunger in Amy’s eyes this time. Alison kissed

back.

*

“Relationships require parity...” said the great red spider as Alison’s cocoon hatched. “I have always cared for you, Alison, I have always wanted you safe but I have wanted your love most of all.”

Alison stretched her legs then walked over the black mirror of the abyss. A great green spider looked back at her.

*

Act II
The Courtship of Monsters

Claudia stood before a lecture hall filled with students as she explained. “We’re all predators, each and every one of us. We all come from a legacy of survival through cruelty...” Claudia noticed a smattering of raised hands and nodded. “Oh, it’s true that our species are also typified by love, play and cooperation. We’ve built temples, hospitals and arcades but these things stem from the central predatory instinct of survival.”

Claudia pressed a button and an image of a pack of wolves bringing down a wild boar appeared. “We cooperate and care for each other because it makes a lot of selfish and pragmatic sense.”

Claudia pressed the button again and an image of a broken bird lying on the side of the road appeared. “We help the helpless so the helpless can help us.” Claudia pressed the button again and the image changed to a healthy bird bringing a gemstone to a windowsill.

“So consider the lamb.” Claudia pressed the button again and an image of a Shepard and his flock of sheep appeared. “We look after them, we rear them and shear them but we do all of this so...” Claudia pressed the button and an image appeared onscreen of lamb chops with gravy. “We might enjoy the fruits of our labours when they are ready to grace our plates.”

The students started packing up their things.

A tall bulky figure in a long black coat wearing a black hat over their shadowed features entered the back of the room silently.

“So remember...” said Claudia. “We are all the children of the gods and we share their capacity for calculated predatory care.”

The students left and Claudia started packing up her stuff.

The tall figure moved deftly through the students then approached Claudia with reverential care. They coughed loudly.

Claudia glanced in their direction. “If you wish to speak to me you can make an appointment with reception.”

The tall figure removed their hat revealing twisted horns and dark skin with a moustache, goatie beard and two inch long tusks protruding out from the mouth. “I wasn’t sure what would be the

appropriate thing to call you. I don't feel I've earned the right to call you by your new name but neither does your majesty feel right anymore."

Claudia turned and regarded the tall figure with fresh appreciation. "Tim Sheckle, as I live and breathe... How the Jack are you, man?"

Sheckle grinned. "Not bad. No, not bad. Got myself a promotion after your empire tore itself to pieces. I'm now head of Eagernot's ECI Unusual Predators division."

"The ECI?" asked Claudia. "You finally processed the name I gave you?"

Sheckle nodded then sighed. "Came up clean, not even a parking ticket."

"Seriously..." said Claudia aghast. "Then the witch is definitely killing people. No one innocent of horror is that careful."

Sheckle chuckled darkly then said. "I'm actually here to ask for your help on a case."

Claudia stared at Sheckle. "I regularly have dinner with a predator who has been picking off my students for decades and you want me to work with the ECI unit that tracks down and catches serial killers? Do I have the word mug tattooed on my forehead? I'll be dead within a month if I'm lucky."

Sheckle nodded then he put on his hat and went to leave.

Claudia called out. "Hang on, why would you ask me? I'm a lecturer in mythology, not a fucking forensic pathologist."

Sheckle paused, then he looked back. "Two victims, genetic analysis collated with public records indicate that they listed themselves as cis, black, male, Vligury."

"Why the fuck did you say themselves?" asked Claudia angrily, storming up to Sheckle.

Sheckle looked away quietly. "Look, I just catch monsters, I don't have the language for this. Just please, come with me to the crime scene. You know mythology, you know gender and sexuality. This isn't our usual fare."

Claudia stared at Sheckle. "You must have trans and non-binary officers, this isn't about that is it?"

Sheckle shook his head quietly.

"Then what the fuck aren't you telling me?" asked Claudia.

"Just have a look." said Sheckle. "All I ask is that you have a look at the crime scene."

Claudia stared at Sheckle, furious then said. "If I do this I want Amelia Hurst."

"I can't do that." said Sheckle emphatically. "I catch monsters. I do not empower vigilantes."

"Then give me Alison Benchley." said Claudia.

"Who?" asked Sheckle.

“Alison Benchley, an old student of mine and the latest to leave over fears of a predator. According to Miss Hurst, Alison Benchley is alive and well and continuing her studies outside of the university, with Hurst as the go between.” said Claudia. “You give me Benchley then either you have cause to go after Hurst because she’s dead as disco or I can go after Benchley and offer her protection in the hope of flushing out the predator.”

Sheckle sighed. “Alright, but if she is alive then I give you her name and she stops being alive I will come for you worse than the Nigellans.”

“Agreed.” said Claudia.

*

The car pulled up to a small house and Sheckle turned to Claudia and handed her what looked like a small tube of lipstick. “Before you step out you’re going to want to smear this around your nostrils.”

“Why?” asked Claudia dubiously, accepting the tube.

“It’ll stop the smell.” said Sheckle.

Claudia smeared the stick of gunk about her nostrils then offered the stick back to Sheckle.

“Keep it.” said Sheckle. “I have my own.”

Claudia pocketed the stick then exited the car. She followed Sheckle to a front door and noticed people in hazmat suits were entering and leaving.

Sheckle flashed his badge to the cop by the door and they were allowed through.

At first glance it looked surreally domestic. This large figure sitting down for dinner amidst half a dozen people in hazmat suits.

Then Claudia got closer and she saw she was looking at a wereshark sitting down for some kind of roast.

A hazmat suited figure said something to Sheckle and Sheckle nodded in response.

Floodlights were switched on outside the windows of the darkened house. With the brilliant white of a 1980s scifi tv show set Claudia could see that she wasn’t looking at a wereshark and a roast dinner.

What looked like a Great White Shark had had the arms and legs of a white Vligury stitched to it. Fishing line from the ceiling kept the frankenshark posed in a sitting position, one hand on the table, another halfway to its large mouth, a morsel of meat on it. The morsel had a browned Vligury nipple visible on it and on the large silver platter on the table was a person. An arm and legless roast brown feminine person with long blonde hair to be precise. The clitoris very much on show.

“Victims names are Ben Gardner and Alex Kintner.” said Sheckle beside Claudia. “We don’t know if they were trans or gender fluid yet but everything on record says they were cis gendered black men from the projects in Pepken, Eagernot.”

Claudia asked. “So the arms and legs?”

“Genetic analysis matches them as belonging to Alex Kintner, the victim on the table.” said Sheckle matter of factly.

“How old were the victims?” asked Claudia.

“65 and 45, nothing to suggest they knew each other as yet.” said Sheckle.

“Well I can tell you one thing, Sheckle, this wasn’t an elder god. This was not a predator that I am familiar with. The Farsh-nuke didn’t do this, the Bam-Kursh didn’t do this and Spring Heeled Jack didn’t do this.” said Claudia turning to Sheckle. “This is a message. This is a warning. This is a smart arsed sadist talking to us.”

“But what is he trying to say?” asked Sheckle.

“Why do you think I know?” asked Claudia. “I’m not a serial killer and I can tell you right now that this sure as shit was not the work of a trans or non-binary person. The killer is cisgendered and utterly transphobic.”

“Do you remember the Battle for Peace?” asked Sheckle.

Claudia nodded. “What are you getting at?”

“I told you then that I could feel a stab in the back coming, I told you to deploy men to protect our capital, you told me I was being paranoid, you told me the enemy would not waste their troops on the attack when we were marching on their homes.” said Sheckle. “Well I’m telling you that I feel in my bones that this tableau has something to do with something you know. I don’t know why and I don’t know how but I am telling you that you can crack this for us.”

“And if I can’t?” asked Claudia.

Sheckle walked out of the house.

Claudia followed after him then said dejectedly. “I’m not going to get your help regarding Alison Benchley am I?”

Sheckle turned to Claudia. “If you’re right just coming here has put you in great danger, I respect that possibility. You will get Alison Benchley. I hope you will respect the possibility that I am right.”

Claudia watched Sheckle go then she sighed. “Send me the case notes, send me everything you can on the victims. If nothing else I can give it a good old college try.”

Sheckle smiled and saluted. “Your Majesty...”

Claudia smiled then she got back in the car.

*

Claudia entered the coffee shop and approached the counter.

Alison served her. “What can I get you today?”

“I think I’ll have a small sweet black coffee please.” said Claudia with a smile.

Alison nodded. “And who shall I say its for?”

“Will Graham.” said Claudia with a grin, watching the answer percolate through Alison’s brain.

That got Alison’s attention. “Very well, the order will be waiting for you at the end, umm, Will.” said Alison.

Claudia winked then went to fetch her coffee.

*

Half an hour later Alison sat in a booth with Claudia.

“It was dangerous of you to come here.” said Alison.

“I know...” said Claudia.

“But I’m happy.” said Alison. “I did what you said, I ran and I ran and when I could not run any more I made a happy life for myself.”

“And what of the others?” asked Claudia. “What of everybody else Amy preys upon.”

“I never said it was Amy.” said Alison.

Claudia laughed. “If you wanted to protect her you shouldn’t have let her be the one to announce your survival.”

Alison looked at her coffee. “Well I didn’t know I liked Amy back then, I figured there was nothing wrong in letting her fall.”

“But now you do?” asked Claudia.

Alison nodded. “I love Amy. She’s so possessive but also so sweet and gentle. Really deeply passionate and romantic.”

“She’s a predator, Alison.” said Claudia.

“I’m not letting you take her from me.” said Alison.

Claudia sighed. “I got to you too late, didn’t I? You’re alive but Amy’s gotten inside your head?”

“Don’t make me lie to you.” said Alison.

Claudia regarded Alison for a long moment then she bit her lip and nodded.

“Thank you for coming though...” said Alison. “My Mistress still doesn’t believe I can be trusted to get in contact with people from my old life.”

“Is she really worth it? Worth abandoning your whole life?” asked Claudia.

“Well I think so now.” said Alison. “I wouldn’t want anything to happen to her.”

Claudia nodded then asked. “What if there was another way? What if Amy could be turned to a force for good? What if you could be allowed to live with her in comfort?”

“What are you thinking?” asked Alison.

“It’s this case I’ve been asked to advise upon.” said Claudia. “I’ve been told I know the answer so I’ve been wracking my brains for anything I might know about serial killers and predators. Back in the days of yore, when the Farsh-nuke still roamed the streets, the super predators worked with the state. It was very nice to have the Bam-Kursh on your side for example.”

“I bet the Bam-Kursh was very much in demand in Eagernot before the Civil War.” said Alison with a devilish smirk.

“Look I don’t have a problem with killing or cannibalism conceptually, I don’t like them but I can think of scenarios when its tolerable, even necessary.” said Claudia. “In fact I’ve killed more than a couple of people who posed a danger to my people in my time and I’ve lived a long enough life to have seen desperate enough circumstances where cannibalism is discussed as an option to avoid starvation.”

“I do hope that wasn’t when you were working as a Professor?” asked Alison uncertainly.

Claudia almost smiled. “No, this was a good 50 years ago, back when I was known as Empress Ithiuldor of the United Elven Hedonists. The dissolution of our power was not quick, nor pleasant.”

“I’m sorry...” said Alison. She reached out to take Claudia’s hand.

“You’re very sweet.” said Claudia with half a smile. “The point is that the world is filled with monsters and if yours lived her life predating on the other monsters I should think I could forgo seeking justice for those less fortunate even than yourself.”

Alison nodded. “Alright, if you can make that happen I’ll provide a statement necessary to prove she is treated with the respect she deserves.”

“Thank you...” said Claudia.

“So what’s this case you’re working on?” asked Alison. “Don’t tell me you’re actually being Will Graham to the CHI?”

Claudia grinned. “See I knew that’d get through however many layers of brainwashing have been performed on you.”

“Is there anything you don’t do?” asked Alison.

“Well I don’t fuck cis white Vligury men.” said Claudia dryly then she pulled out her phone. “Actually you might be able to help me with this. I just got sent the case files to have a look through, do you want me to send you them?”

“Okay...” said Alison as she pulled out her phone and authorised a bluetooth folder transfer.

“Two black men made to resemble white women, one further turned into a wereshark, the killer butchers one victim and has both posed like this...” said Claudia.

Alison scanned through the photos.

“The guy in charge is a mate of mine and certain this has a mythological connection.” said Claudia.

“Well yeah...” said Alison. “Weresharks work through healing based on the soul, whatever was done to these victims it wasn’t just mutilation and murder. The killer could either soul read enough to spot a trans person who didn’t know it yet or they warped the victim’s soul. Either way the wereshark transformation would have taken some serious magic to control.”

“How the fuck do you know about magic?” asked Claudia.

“I just like researching mythological subjects.” said Alison, carefully avoiding eyecontact with Claudia.

“Anyone ever tell you you might be on the autistic spectrum?” asked Claudia curiously.

“Oh yeah I’m certified.” said Alison as she stared into her coffee and flapped her hands.

“Still, I think you’re probably right.” said Claudia quietly then she smirked. “And that would be why Timothy was oh so hesitant to clarify exactly why he knew it was mythologically connected.”

“Also it says here that the wereshark’s chest showed no signs of incision but the hearts were still missing.” said Alison. “I’m betting this is a follower of Spring-heeled Jack in order to disembowel from a distance.”

“Do you want a job?” asked Claudia, impressed.

Alison snorted. “Because that would go over so well, wouldn’t it?”

Claudia chuckled. “Yeah, maybe not...”

“I’ll give these a look over though...” said Alison. “I suggest you have a think on what message this person is trying to send. What does a sharkman eating a white woman mean?”

“You don’t know?” asked Claudia.

“You over estimate my power.” said Alison.

Claudia nodded. “Well it has been very informative speaking to you but I am afraid I must go.”

Alison nodded. “Pleasure seeing you too Miss, or should I say Empress?”

Claudia laughed then she leaned over and whispered. “Don’t say that to Amy, we don’t want to give her any ideas now, do we?”

Alison giggled.

Claudia rose from her seat and exited the cubicle then she paused and turned to Alison. “Oh and if Amy does ask you can tell her that if anything happens to you something very bad will happen to me and so I will have nothing to stop me coming after her.”

Alison nodded. “Long life to you, Miss.”

“Same to you, Alison.” said Claudia before she left the store.

*

“I select my prey.” said Alison as she strode through the streets of downtown Pepken besides a great green spider. Alison spotted a couple of unemployed scrap merchants. “Old, black and poor. Nobody will miss them.”

“I speak with honeyed words.” said Alison. She strode up to the men, smiley faced, as they reacted to her offer first cautiously then excitedly. “They are nervous at first. Prey is always nervous at first, especially prey used to being mistreated by society but desperate men make pragmatic decisions to my advantage.”

Alison sealed one of the black men inside a packing box, another of a similar size lay not so far away. “I don’t need to smuggle them. I’ve done nothing illegal yet but I want them to feel guilty and vulnerable. I want them weak and malleable.”

Alison stood before a quiet house in Labologna. Two packing boxes beside her. “In fair Labologna we set our scene. Far from the jurisdiction of my prey but not from the databases that will prove who my prey are. I want the authorities to know who my prey are. I want the public to know who my prey are.”

Inside the house Alison pulled an old black man from a box then injected him. The other box lay unopened. “I have prepared mixtures for this moment specially. I take my time, turning first one.” Alison tossed the black man aside then opened the other crate and began to inject that man. “And then the other.”

Alison dismembered a blonde feminine corpse then carried it to a baking tray and stuck it in the oven. “I prepare the meal first. Beautiful, soft and a picture of patriarchal pleasure, this one plays the part of the damsel in distress with ease.”

Alison turned to where a black man writhed in agony on the floor. “To prepare the monster takes longer and is much more dangerous.”

Alison picked up the black man by the shoulders then dragged him to a toilet and rammed his head in the bowl, she flushed the handle repeatedly until he transformed into a creature with the head, dorsal fin and tail of a Great White Shark but the torso and arms and legs of a werewolf. “To bring out the beast is easy enough, I drown my prey in water, forcing gills to form. Once the beast awakes I calm it with my magic and force the prey to take on a fully shark form.” Alison planted a hand on the forehead of the shark and watched as he turned.

Alison raised her hand before her and glared at the shark as her hand glowed with dark energy. “The power of Spring-heeled Jack lets me give a mercifully quick death to the prey playing the part of Predator.” Three still beating hearts appeared in Alison’s hand and the shark died instantaneously.

Alison dragged the shark into the dining room then picked up an arm from the other victim and started sewing it to the shark in place of the right pectoral fin. “I use the fins as my guide as I start the work of sewing together a new wereshark from predator and prey.”

Alison sat back and panting from the effort as she looked at the completed frankenshark. The oven timer pinged and Alison glanced up at the ceiling. “The rigging of the scene begins.”

Alison stood back and looked at the Frankenshark as it sat before a meal of roast white femme, a nipple on its fork. “I am the servant of the ripper. I can control gender, race and rage. I am predator and architect and this is my advert. A beast of shark and Vligury, masculine and feminine, black and white, predator and prey. It shall consume the white femme Vligury and do so with class and style from the comfort of its own home. At the same time however it shall be my puppet and my victim.”

*

Alison woke up in bed. She was alone in her bedroom. The door was still locked. She got dressed in jeans and a leather jacket then opened the gun safe and pulled out two pistols. She made sure they were working and had a clip of bullets each before she went out.

Alison walked through the late night streets of Shlattensberg. Visions from her dream coming back to her.

“You aren’t well...” said Amy. Only when Alison looked, it wasn’t Amy speaking but the great red spider.

“Well no...” agreed Alison. “This would rather serve as evidence that I am not okay.”

“You should seek help.” said the great red spider.

“Oh, my Mistress would love that...” said Alison before she impersonated the roles in the imagined conversation. “‘Mistress, I think I need to get myself sectioned because I’m dreaming about perpetrating murder and hallucinating seeing you as a spider.’ ‘Oh, of course, Honey, of course. Now if you would just help me in the kitchen first...’”

“Then what do you want to do?” asked the great red spider.

“I want to stop this murderer.” said Alison. “I know from experience that Amy is humane with her kills. This monster respects nothing.”

“So stop them.” said the great red spider.

“How? How the fuck do I stop a monster like this?” asked Alison. “I mean the police can’t stop Amy so they’re useless and I wouldn’t last five minutes.”

“So remember what I taught you.” said the great red spider. “Use a weapon.”

Alison laughed. “That monster is an experienced magic user. I can’t take it on. Not even with a gun.”

“Except the gun isn’t what kills is it?” said the great red spider. “The gun is just a vehicle to deliver that which kills for you.”

Alison stared at the great red spider.

“Claudia said as much herself. Set a monster to catch a monster.” said the great red spider.

*

Alison woke up in bed, her phone on top of her face, pictures from the crime scene still visible on the screen. Alison set aside the phone, got out of bed, walked to the mirror and turned on the light. She looked at herself in the mirror. Her face was haggard.

“Fuuuuck...” Alison exhaled quietly then a thought occurred to her and she turned to look where the gun safe was. “Huh...” She pulled out her phone and sent a single text to Claudia.

And The Beast From The Sea.

*

Claudia tossed and turned in her sleep as her brain processed the information.

*

“Stepped right out of the fridge.” said Amy to Claudia over dinner.

*

A beautiful, white, blonde, skinny, female Vligury advanced upon Amy and fired a bullet between her eyes. A bullet that did little to actually stop Amy.

*

“They were men.” said Sheckle to Claudia.

A beautiful, white, blonde, skinny feminine Vligury lay dismembered and roasted on the table. Arms and legs sewn to form the limbs of the shark that was puppeteered to dine with cutlery.

*

“What does a shark man eating a white woman mean?” asked Alison at the coffee shop.

*

Claudia’s phone bleeped and bleary eyed, still half asleep, she read it.

“The fuck does that mean?” she asked aloud and tossed the phone away.

Sleep overtook Claudia, and with sleep came dreaming.

*

Claudia was sat on her throne as empress of the United Elven Hedonists, machine gun between her hands, wards of silence over her ears. The cis white male Vligury entered, wearing red coats.

“Greetings your majesty.” signed the invader with the most gold embroidery on his uniform. “The Nigellans send their regards.”

“Leave!” roared Claudia, a second before she started firing the machine gun.

It was a dream Claudia had experienced many a time before except this time instead of the eerie silence, a song was playing.

It was a twanging folky guitar song, it made Claudia think of boozy nights under the stars in the greater continent.

Claudia watched herself mowing down the white men as this incredibly chilled out music played. She was certain she knew this song from somewhere. A wider context than the song itself. Well she supposed she had to, it was playing inside her head.

She looked around and spotted a young white male Vligury with glasses and a neckbeard, wearing pyjamas and a red and green striped dressing gown, sitting down and playing on an acoustic guitar. He had emerald green eyes. Why was that important?

And then the music again. This time it was the minor second and that meant one thing and one thing only.

“But I’m not afraid of sharks...” wondered Claudia aloud as the great beast launched itself out of the water and came crashing down upon her.

Claudia’s feet disappeared inside the mouth of the shark as she was dragged through the depths. “Oh, I am so stupid, so utterly and completely stupid. Everything about this crime was meticulously staged to be a message so who are the victims? Kinter and Gardner. Victims of the beast from the sea.”

The beast launched into the air then ejected Claudia.

As Claudia fell through the nothingness she nodded. “And what is sharkploitation if not in essence a genre about beasts from the sea predating upon pretty young white women.”

Claudia fell into a sticky white web and saw Alison and one other caught up in the webs. “And what is vore, what is cannibalism, what is predation but the adherence to a repeated meme dating back to the first meal of the greatest predator of them all, from whence the first eternal soul was forged in sacrifice?” asked Claudia.

The great beast swam through the great green sea of the nothingness until it came at last to a lost and lonely skinny white woman.

The music changed to the twanging melody again as the scene transitioned before Claudia.

Claudia stood in her lecture hall before Alison and Amy. The lamb and the butcher. They looked so happy together.

The beast launched itself out of the shadows at Amy.

Amy screamed and her person suit tore away in her anger to reveal the great red spider lurking

beneath.

Claudia ran outside.

Alison stood atop a water tower screaming her guts out as the great shark swam through the air around her.

The great red spider leapt towards one building then immediately towards another and another, the spider skipped off a passing news helicopter and landed on the shark.

The spider stabbed at the shark with her legs and sprayed silk in the shark's mouth.

The shark squirmed and flailed, gnashing impotently with its teeth before diving through a building. in the hopes of scraping off the spider.

All the while, as the monsters fought, the folksy twanging guitar music played.

*

Alison came home from work and got changed into a short pink skirt and short pink sleeveless top.

She found Amy in the basement cutting distinct chunks of meat from the corpse of a person.

"You shouldn't be here." said Amy gruffly.

"I'm one of your victims, remember?" said Alison wryly. "And I can't exactly get in trouble with the police if you're going to eat me can I?"

Amy grimaced. "You have an infuriating habit of always winning arguments."

"I know..." said Alison as she pat Amy on the back. She squinted at the carcass. "Anybody I know?"

"Doubt it..." said Amy as her blade cleaved through the flesh. "I do supply work for the money and I like to keep in contact with my favourite students so I can pick the perfect moment to stop by and say hello."

Alison tried to keep a straight face as she said. "This is hello?"

"Well, it was going to be our first date, remember." said Amy dryly.

"We should do that again sometime." said Alison fondly.

"Do not tempt me." said Amy as she finished sawing through bone.

"I mean it..." said Alison in the kind of meaningful romantic tone normally associated with wistful nostalgia of meals out in Florence or Venice.

"Honey, I was going to eat you." said Amy pointedly. "And you are in my basement while I am armed and butchering a person."

"Yeah..." said Alison, acquiescing. "But it was also really fucking hot to utterly surrender myself to

you.”

Amy sighed. “Is there a reason you’re bothering me?”

“I heard there’s another serial killer on the loose.” said Alison.

“And you are telling me, why?” asked Amy, still focused on her work.

Alison sighed then she shrugged and said. “Because I want you to stop them.”

Amy laughed. “Honey, I’m not police.”

“I’ll pay you.” said Alison.

Amy chuckled. “Honey, you’re very sweet but you earn minimum wage and I am an extremely well regarded university Professor.”

“I’ll pay you by letting you find someone for me to form a relationship with.” said Alison. “You can decide the nature of our relationship, how I am to play it, you can puppet me and script me and when all is said and done you can eat them when you eat me.”

Amy stopped carving and set down the knife. “I am not your pimp, Alison.”

“No. No, you work with consent and I respect that.” said Alison. “But I am telling you I will pay you for a service with a service of my own.”

Amy rose and turned to look at Alison. She sighed at the sight of the young woman. “And what if I wanted you to fall in love with someone”

“I already love you.” said Alison with a smile.

Amy gave half a smile then said. “When my partner returns it would be nice to have you on the table but you don’t deserve to be alone if I am not alone.”

Alison smirked. “You mean like a double date?”

Amy was visibly distressed and she reached out to stroke Alison’s face. “I just don’t want you to be alone in the end and if I have to be the dispassionate cook...”

“It’ll be beautiful...” said Alison as she clutched Amy’s hand to her cheek.

“Even though...?” asked Amy regretfully.

“Even though...” agreed Alison.

Amy touched her forehead to Alison. “I am not worthy.”

“Catch this monster and you will be.” said Alison.

*

Claudia stood in the lecture hall before a room full of students and explained. “The Farsh-nuke is

the anima and the animus, male and female, predator and prey. The Farsh-nuke is two souls combined recurring throughout history. Farsh-nuke and Lucy. The monster god and the prey woman. He is a shark, a lonely predator who has wandered the abyss of the nothingness like our own Mundis Turpis wanders the galactic sea. And what does this shark seek. He seeks to consume the white female Vligury. A monster who recreates his founding moment over and over throughout history, consuming those he loves as he meets and comes to understand them."

Amy entered.

"And that's class dismissed." said Claudia as she clapped her hands.

"But you never answered what happened to him." said the male dragonborn from before.

"Not important." said Claudia cheerily before running past, grabbing Amy by the arm and frog marching her out of the room.

"You left your stuff?" asked Amy confused.

"Smile and look like you know where I'm taking you." hissed Claudia forcefully, a broad grin on her face.

Amy fixed a grin to her features and looked ahead, marching lockstep with Claudia. "You picked a bad day to go Hyde on me but I'll play along for now."

Claudia opened a door, shoved Amy inside, then entered and closed the door after her.

Amy looked around at the small broom cupboard. "Unless you have inexplicably decided to vent your sexual frustration on me, I think we're in the wrong room."

Claudia turned on the light switch then hissed. "I know..."

"What?" asked Amy.

"I've always known..." said Claudia with a cruel grin. "Dear sweet Alison is smarter than she appears. I told her nobody who spoke of being stalked by a predator ever reappeared so when you turned up with one of the disappeared I knew exactly who the predator was."

"Oh shit..." said Amy.

"Now run." said Claudia. "Run home and take Alison with you. Run as far and fast as you can then run some more."

"But Alison -?" asked Amy nervously.

"Eat the witch for all I care, at least you'll kill her humanely." said Claudia.

"What the fuck is going on?" asked Amy.

"There's a killer right now that I've been asked to track down." explained Claudia. "With the consent of Alison I had your name submitted to a programme intended to combat such killers, except I have just worked out what message the killer was sending."

“Right...” said Amy nervously.

“The Farsh-nuke is coming back.” said Claudia. “The man who wrote the Silfavorecon is returning from hell and unless I am very much mistaken you are going to be chosen to stop him. So run. Run home and enjoy your last good meal before the Farsh-nuke comes to eat you.”

Amy stared. “Why would the Farsh-nuke eat me?”

“Have you looked in a mirror lately?” asked Claudia. “You and Alison are not as different as you would like to think.”

Amy coughed awkwardly. “Actually I’m here because Alison made me an offer I can’t refuse in exchange for stopping this killer.”

Claudia groaned. “You gorgeous dimwits deserve each other.”

“So can you help me or not?” asked Amy.

Claudia nodded. “Hand yourself into the local police station. Tell them you’re the Ghost of St.Godwinsons, tell them the Empress of the United Elven Hedonists sent you, tell them you’re ready to kill some monsters.”

Amy nodded. “Thank you.”

“Or you could go home, euthanise that young love of yours and get ready to kill a god.” said Claudia.

“I made a deal.” said Amy.

“Fine, feed yourself to the Farsh-nuke.” said Claudia irritably as she reopened the cupboard. “Just don’t say I didn’t fucking warn you.”

Amy exited the cupboard. “You know you can be really scary sometimes?”

Claudia laughed bitterly as she walked away.

*

Amy walked to the local police station in her jeans and leather jacket. She walked right up the desk sergeant and coughed politely then waited until they were free. The green skinned orc wore a navy blue blazer and grunted. “Yes...”

“Umm, I’m the ghost of St.Godwinsons, the Empress of the United Elven Hedonists sent me and I’m umm... well I’m ready to kill some monsters so umm...” said Amy awkwardly.

“Right you are, Miss. It is Miss isn’t it?” asked the desk sergeant as they entered the details into the computer system

Amy nodded. “Amelia Hurst actually, Amy to my friends.”

“Right you are, Miss Hurst...” said the desk sergeant. “I only ask because I had a sapient shade of blue come in the other day, was quite affronted when I incorrectly assumed he was non-binary.

Quite a proud cis male actually, very pleased with how overtly masculine he was too." The desk sergeant shrugged. "I don't like to discriminate so I felt it best to be extra careful."

Amy nodded. "Well blue lives do matter."

"Right you are, Miss, right you are..." said the desk sergeant sagely. "Everyone always talks about how black lives matter but when sapient shades of blue insist on an end to discrimination suddenly it's racist and fascist..."

Amy nodded sympathetically then asked. "So what does your terminal say?"

The desk sergeant checked the read out. "Umm it says here you are a dangerous and deadly serial killer who manipulates using femininity and psychological manipulation through speech and are as such to be treated as armed with a deadly weapon at all times unless bound and gagged."

"Oh fun..." said Amy with a smile.

The desk sergeant looked at Amy then said. "Nah, that can't be right. You don't look like a dangerous and deadly serial killer."

Amy smirked. "Well, tell you what, why don't you lock me up in one of your cells while you send word to your superiors and wait for them to clarify your orders."

"Would you do that?" asked the desk sergeant. "That would be most helpful, Miss."

"Well you know the Eagernot police force gets a very bad rap and I think that is frightfully unfair because you really are just wonderful people making dreadful sacrifices to keep the streets safe." said Amy earnestly.

The desk sergeant looked over as a tall white male Vligury in the uniform strode over. "Frank, escort this lovely young lady to Cell 7 please and lock her in."

"Cell 7?" asked the white male Vligury. "But that's the one with the proper toilet and nice mattress."

"Yeah, well she's probably innocent of all accusations." said the desk sergeant. "Look at her."

Amy presented her wrists. "Officer, if you wish to cuff me?"

"Nah..." said the white male Vligury. "Just follow me and know that if you try anything funny I'll twat ya."

Amy nodded and gave a salute before resting her hands to her sides. "Aye, Sir, respecting your twatting skills, Sir."

The white male Vligury snorted and led Amy to the cells. He unlocked cell 7.

Amy entered.

The white male Vligury locked the cell door and walked away.

Amy lay down on the bed and imagined what kind of person would complement Alison on the

dinner table.

*

The sound of keys turning in locks was like thunder heralding a storm and Amy woke from fantasising about how she would cook Alison.

Tim Sheckle removed his hat as he regarded Amy from outside the bars. “I am very tempted to leave you to rot here, Miss Hurst.”

Amy laughed. “You’d be better off trying to kill me.”

“Can you tell us where Alison Benchley is?” asked Sheckle.

Amy nodded. “She’ll either be at her place of work which Claudia Green definitely knows, or she’ll be at my house, which you should have on record.”

Sheckle nodded then he said. “We’re looking at treating her as as witness and a victim of your crimes.”

Amy nodded. “Alison Benchley did nothing wrong. I will testify that she had no agency during her time with me.”

“And if she disagrees?” asked Sheckle.

Amy snorted. “You don’t believe victims of abuse when they make allegations why should you believe a victim when they say they weren’t one...”

“You don’t think much of the police do you, Miss Hurst?” said Sheckle with disgust.

Amy smirked. “Insulting a police officer, now that is a capital crime in any state.”

Sheckle looked to the white male Vligury, who unlocked the door to allow him to enter.

“Ooh, are we going to get physical now?” asked Amy with a grin. “I love a good pounding by a police officer.”

“You have friends in high places, Miss Hurst. Very very high places.” said Sheckle as he looked heavenward.

“Impossible...” said Amy, horrified.

“Look, I’m just a soldier.” said Sheckle. “I follow orders and I carry out tasks. I am a weapon of the Unified Government of Eagernot. You, at this moment, have a higher security clearance than I and indeed I have been informed that if I so much as lightly touch you without your explicit consent then I will be perpetrating treason in the eyes of the law. Would you kindly come with me, Miss Hurst?”

“Well since you asked so nicely, how on Mundis could I ever refuse?” asked Amy cheerfully as she rose to her feet.

*

Amy Hurst walked side by side with Tim Sheckle out of the prison and into the back of a waiting people carrier.

She settled down into the car and smirked at the old Ogre. “You served with Claudia didn’t you?”

The old detective didn’t answer, he just quietly slid has hand towards the handle of the revolver in his jacket.

Amy sat back as the car drove off and she closed her eyes.

In her mind Alison was waiting for her at the center of a church. The young brunette dressed in a white silk wedding dress. “Mistress...” She crooned. “I hope you have an appetite...”

*

The car pulled up at last and the chill air stirred Amy from her fantasies as Sheckle exited then offered her a hand out.

“You’re a brave man to offer your hand to me.” said Amy as she accepted his help as she exited the vehicle.

“Not brave, just confident in my friends...” said Sheckle.

With that Amy looked over his shoulder to where an old overweight and grey haired woman in a dowdy business suit strode out of the shadows of the underground car park. “Pleased to meet you. Allow me to introduce myself. I am a woman of great wealth and taste, stole many a man’s soul and heart, I’ve lived a long hard life and I have many stories to tell. I have many names, many titles, but there is only one that matters for our meeting. I am Galla Placidia and you may consider yourself blessed to have met me.”

“Well fuck me.” said Amy in shock.

“Perhaps later but I believe we have work to do first. If you will come with me?” asked Galla Placidia.

“Okay...” said Amy as she bowed her head. “Okay...”

Galla Placidia looked to Sheckle. “You will see that the young ones are well taken care of won’t you?”

Sheckle nodded, gave a salute then got back in the Volvo.

Amy walked with Galla Placidia in silence. The calm and confident killer reduced to a child bought before the school head mistress.

“You’re very quiet...” noted Galla Placidia.

“My dad taught me that good girls speak when they are spoken to.” said Amy.

“Did you kill him?” asked Galla Placidia.

“No.” said Amy bluntly.

“Good.” said Galla Placidia with a smile.

“But I killed others.” said Amy nervously. “I’ve killed so many innocents.”

“Yes, and you will have to pay for that.” said Galla Placidia quietly. “But you aren’t going to go to hell if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“Why not?” asked Amy as she looked at Galla Placidia. “I’m a monster. I kill for fun and pleasure. I kill out of pettiness and for sexual gratification. I deserve eternal torment.”

“You have made quite the impression on a champion of a good friend of mine.” said Galla Placidia. “But I’ll let her explain that.”

“What?” asked Amy nervously.

Galla Placidia and Amy came to a door.

Galla Placidia looked to Amy and said. “Go on, I’ll be right behind you.”

*

Amy entered. It was a plush glass and concrete office space and Pacifus Subis stood in an orange wrap dress. The goddess gestured to a seat.

Amy went and sat down where Pacifus indicated.

Galla Placidia asked if anyone would like some tea or coffee.

Amy nodded. “Umm, Frappe latte, please?”

Galla Placia laughed then laid a comforting hand on Amy’s shoulder. “You’ll be fine. We’re the good guys. We don’t hurt people needlessly.”

“Yeah, because good guys never violently hurt those who aren’t.” said Amy doubtfully.

Galla Placidia laughed then left the room.

Amy looked at Pacifus Subis nervously. “So...”

Pacifus smiled. “You did a very brave thing in allowing Alison to contact me you know?”

Amy shrugged. “I wanted her to to have powers, that was just one way.”

Pacifus looked carefully at Amy. “You could have gone to Jack. You have served him well, he would have surely granted your request to empower Alison. Especially as you would be selling him a soul you would soon be sending in his direction.”

Amy shook her head. “One doesn’t deal with Jack unless they have no other option.”

“All the same you could have done it.” said Pacifus. “You could have avoided my attention and felt

comfortable in the knowledge that your precious honeybee would be waiting in hell for your arrival. I wouldn't have been surprised if you could even have parlayed her suffering into an early release into a role as torturer. You could have spent eternity making her scream."

"Yeah but I didn't want that, did I?" said Amy, clearly upset by the idea.

"And that's why you are brave, Amy. You made yourself known to the goddess of light and love to save the soul of your beloved, even as you intended to eat her." said Pacifus. "You sacrificed your eternal happiness for hers. You must have known I would take that into consideration."

Amy laughed bitterly. "No. No, I - I am damned and I accept that. I wish I could be with her but I know I can't because I know I have to eat her."

Pacifus smiled. "You I know I hear Alison's prayers and quite often I'll hear some variant along the lines of 'Please let her find a third way. Let her find a way to have me and eat me. Let her enjoy what I know she hungers for.' It bothers my champion that she can't satisfy you. That's quite feat of sadism you've mastered."

Amy snorted. "Well, forgive me if I'm not relishing in my success at failing to be truly happy with her."

"And what if we could give you that third way?" asked Galla Placidia as she returned with a tea for herself and a coffee for Pacifus.

"What's the catch?" asked Amy.

"The Farsh-nuke is returning." said Pacifus Subis.

"We don't know how and we don't know when." said Galla Placidia.

"But we know he is and we want your help." said Pacifus Subis.

Amy swallowed. "You want me to fight him, right?"

Galla Placidia and Pacifus Subis shared a look.

Galla Placidia said. "You knew the Farsh-nuke didn't you. You knew him quite well?"

"Yeah..." said Amy cautiously. "He took me in after the Gardener stranded me back in time and my husband went missing. What of it?"

Pacifus looked at Amy with concern.

"We think we can use that." said Galla Placidia. "You have served as faithful champion to Springheeled Jack for over a thousand years and you were very close to the Farsh-nuke for a few thousand years. You've learned at the feet of the two greatest and most evil deities. How wuld you like to become as Goddess yourself?"

Amy looked at the Goddess curiously. "What are you getting at?"

"We want to offer you an apprenticeship." clarified Galla Placidia. "We want you to replace the Farsh-nuke on the Council."

“Why?” asked Amy.

“You have travelled with the Gardener, you are Champion of the King of Hell, the Farsh-nuke loves you and you might be the only mortal with enough experience to replace him.” said Galla Placidia seriously.

“Besides, it’s about time that seat was filled.” said Pacifus bluntly, then she looked to Amy and said. “You do want to become a goddess don’t you?”

Amy smiled. “Well, of course”

“Good, good...” said Pacifus cheerfully. “We would like to retain the balance of the Council and we believe you would be able t provide a similar role to the council as the Farsh-nuke”

Amy nodded. “That sounds very reasonable.”

“Well, there is one small thing you should know. You need a mentor to learn under.” said Pacifus.

“And?” asked Amy curiously.

“And I would like you.” said Galla Placidia sweetly. “You’d make a darling apprentice and I’d love to have your soul.”

“Wow...” said Amy. “You sentenced my Master to burn in the deepest darkest pit of hell and not only do you want me to kill him but you want me to call you Mistress?

“Amy, we need to make sure you won’t cause trouble.” said Pacifus gently.

“You... You want to turn the Farsh-nuke’s own submissive against him and make her yoou loyal puppet?” said Amy with horrified fascination. “You’re going to seduce me and change who I am just because of the Farsh-nuke?”

“In return we will make you into a Goddess and you can have as many pets as your heart desires.” said Galla Placidia sweetly. “I think you’ll like being my apprentice.”

“You really think I’m going too go along with this?” said Amy, stunned.

Pacifus shrugged. “You don’t really have a choice, do you?”

“Well what do Viorum Kaztif-tan and Gfaxxy Quluwmcy think of this?” asked Amy pointedly. “What does the Bam-Kursh think?”

“Viorum and Gfaxxy have already expressed their agreement to us privately.” said Pacifus carefully. “The wrath of the Farsh-nuke is too great a danger to risk.”

“And as for the Bam-Kursh...” said Galla Placidia with a grin. “Well you’ll be seeing her later.”

“No.” said Amy flatly.

Galla Placidia stared at Amy like she was mad.

“No, I love the Farsh-nuke. I am not going to stand opposed to a man I love and worship, to the one god whose words have ever given me solace and comfort.” said Amy.

Pacifus smiled. “I had hoped you would say that...”

Amy closed her eyes and mentally prepared herself. In her mind she played Goldberg Variations and focused on her breathing to slow her heart rate.

“Someone wanted a frappe latte?” asked a soft female voice.

Amy reopened her eyes and was greeted to the sight of a beautiful, young, skinny, white, feminine Vligury woman with soft features and smooth, straight, long blonde hair. She was dressed in high heeled shoes that showed off her ankles, a skirt that finished just below her knees, a sleeveless low cut top and a collar about her neck. All in shades of green and her eyes were jade green. She carried an Avon’s takeaway mug in her hands.

“Careful.” said Galla Placidia with a smirk. “She’s a man eater.”

Amy reached out a hand. “Err, the coffee’s for me.”

The green beauty handed the coffee to Amy then said. “You can pick your jaw up off the floor now. You might need it for later.”

Amy’s stomach rumbled loudly and Amy went pink in the face.

“I believe you’ve met Lucy Danse.” said Pacifus proudly.

Amy nodded then sipped her coffee, reassured by the burn of the boiling hot coffee. “Who’s looking after her?”

“Oh, my owner’s just making the final preparations to reward you for agreeing to work with us.” said Lucy cheerfully.

“So you are on board with me trying to kill the Farsh-nuke?” asked Amy doubtfully.

Lucy sighed then she sat on Amy’s lap and said. “I love the Farsh-nuke, you know that. He found me and he tamed me. He gave me immortality and happiness but I am no fool. I know how dangerous he can be and I dislike that. Your girl was unhappy about you killing innocents and so she prayed for a third way, gave her consent to have you sent here so your very particular set of skills might serve the greater good. Is it so crazy that I would feel the same way about my Master?”

Amy groaned. “Look, even if I wanted to, Claudia warned me to run because at the end of the day I can’t go after the Farsh-nuke because he will come after the people I care about and I need her safe.”

“I think you’d better take her to your owner.” said Pacifus sagely.

Lucy looked to Galla Placidia.

Galla Placidia nodded her consent.

“Come on...” said Lucy, rising to her feet. “I think it’s time you learned what your reward will be.”

So Amy rose to her feet and walked with Lucy out of the room and into a corridor.

*

Amy asked quietly. “Would it be incredibly impolite and sacrilegious to ask for the possibility of enjoying you in a most sexual fashion later?”

Lucy grinned, looked at Amy then said quietly. “Were I not already inclined to ask much the same of you I would have you burned at the stake for that remark.”

“Well I am a witch.” said Amy with a grin. “So might we?”

“If my owner consents, why not?” said Lucy with a grin.

Amy closed her eyes then gestured ahead. Her eyes took a moment to enjoy the sight of Lucy walking away from her then she caught herself and walked quietly after her.

*

Lucy led Amy into a room filled with bunsen burners, test tubes and pestle and mortars. A tall flame haired figure stood hunched over something at the back of the room.

“Mistress!” called Lucy.

The figure turned and Amy saw she was looking at a tall, craggy faced, Pictish Vligury woman dressed in a long black cloak. The strange woman grinned like a shark. “And you would be Amelia Hurst, the adorable Vampire Thrall, the doll who can be quite the handful.”

Amy swallowed. “And you would be the Bam-Kursh?”

“Right you are!” cried the strange woman ecstatically as she started circling round Amy and approached closer as she did so. “How very right you are. My you are a clever young thing aren’t you?”

“I’m over 7000 years old.” said Amy defensively as she tried to maintain sight of the strange woman.

The strange woman cackled. “Bless you, you think that’s impressive.” She was close enough now that Amy could feel her breath on the back of her neck. “You are but a spring lamb gambolling about in the field.”

“I’ve killed people.” said Amy.

“So I’ve heard.” said the strange woman she paused to sniff Amy and smiled at the odour. “You think yourself quite impressive, is that not so?”

Amy jutted out her chin defiantly. “I think I’ve portrayed myself quite admirably, yeah...”

The strange woman cackled. “You will make a good toy.”

Amy laughed nervously. “I’m not becoming a toy...”

The Bam-Kursh laid a hand upon Amy's shoulder then whispered sweetly. "You have been chosen because you are a powerful and formidable woman who is none the less funny and aesthetically pleasing enough that you will make quite a fine pet or plaything for Galla Placidia once the farsh-nuke has been killed."

Amy shuddered. "She don't just want me to fight the Farsh-nuke, she wants me to submit to her, consider her my Mistress?"

"What do you know of the Sylphs, Amy?" asked the Bam-Kursh.

"I know they were bought here by the Logicios as slaves and revlted but I coonfess I doon't know much more than that." admitted Amy.

"Good, I like explaining things." said the Bam-Kursh cheerfully before explained. "The Sylphs were designed in a laboratory to be practically perfect in every way and the Logicios would turn people into Sylphs using a special potion derived from the excretions of an artificially created creature. I have turned Lucy into one such Sylph to ensure her obedience to me. It is an obedience and submissiveness so profound that it counterbalances the natural rage of the wereshark."

Amy looked to Lucy and frowned. "But she has will and agency..."

"That she will never ever use, not when push comes to shove. Even now, as she works to undermine the Farsh-nuke, it is for her Master's own benefit." said the Bam-Kursh proudly. "I would agree that for my tastes the Farsh-nuke lets his pets have far too much agency. That would not happen were I allowed to turn her into a toy. The point remains however that Lucy is a Sylph, as you will be."

"That's impossible." said Amy.

The Bam-Kursh proudly presented a disgusting smelling concoction to Amy. "Not when you drink this. It will burn you alive and your memories will vanish in the process until your body has regrown to sufficient size for the memories to be retrieved from the information in your soul."

"Why?" asked Amy. "What happens when it rebuilds you?"

"This will turn you into an egg laying Sylph. A kind of reverse vampire, a beautiful immortal who becomes extremely submissive, in this case with one particular owner who is imprinted upon in the raising." said the Bam-Kursh cheerfully..

"And why the fuck would I ever consent to become a Sylph, to become property? Why would I consent to be burned alive?" asked Amy.

"Lucy come here, I want to show Amy something." said the Bam-Kursh.

Lucy strode over to stand beside the Bam-Kursh.

"Do you have the knife I asked you to look after?" asked the Bam-Kursh,

Lucy nodded.

"Give it me, would you, my dear?" asked the Bam-Kursh as she held out her hand.

Lucy pulled the knife from the pocket of her skirt.

Amy's mind rushed as she watched the bizarre scene.

"You're such a good girl aren't you, Lucy..." said the Bam-Kursh as she tookg the knife from Lucy and kissed her lovingly on the forehead.

Lucy smiled with love in her eyes.

The Bam-Kursh slit her throat.

Lucy let out a small gasp as blood erupted from her neck.

Amy roared. "You lich!!!"

The Bam-Kursh had a shit eating grin on her face. "See. Do you see..."

And Amy did see.

Amy saw Lucy's neck knitting itself back together until not even a scab or a scar remained.

Lucy giggled. "Your face, Amy. Anyone would think my Mistress had actually killed me?"

"Have you ever had the misfortune to tangle with a wereshark?" asked the Bam-Kursh.

Amy frowned and looked thoughtful.

The Bam-Kursh gleefully explained. "They change form on demand or when it will aid their survival and - most crucially for us - they come with three hearts - The heart of a person, the heart of a wolf and the heart of a shark - and so long as one valve still beats it will keep creating blood with which to try and heal. A single heart left on its own will regenerate the entire body, memories taken from the soul."

Amy stared at Lucy's neck.

"Amy, the sylph potion I want to give you can overwhelm the urge to dominate of the wereshark. She will taste sweeter, her skin will make better leather and, if you give her the blood of a wereshark, you can butcher every everyday without having to ever say goodbye to the woman you love because she will heal up entirely, even if you eat her brain." said the Bam-Kursh. "I am offering you a chance to eat Alison and keep her too."

Amy staggered backwards. "Impossible. Impossible. I don't get a happy ending. People like me do not get happy endings. This is a trap. This has to be a trap."

Lucy whispered something to the Bam-Kursh.

Amy started crying. "Oh god, Farsh-nuke, my Lord! I'm so sorry! I'm so ridiculously sorry."

The Bam-Kursh held out the handle of the knife to Amy and said. "Lucy, would like to offer you something to provide comfort in your taming."

"I love the Farsh-nuke..." whimpered Amy. "I can't sell him out. I just can't, not to Galla Placidia."

The Bam-Kursh looked conflicted but she said. “Take the girl’s heart, Amy, you’re a butcher, you know where to find the human heart. Take it from Lucy. She wants you to have a copy of her, no matter what happens next.”

“I can’t betray the Farsh-nuke, I just can’t.” said Amy, clearly upset.

“Take the knife.” said the Bam-Kursh soothingly. “I think I might be able to offer you a third way.”

Amy nodded quietly, she bit her lip then she looked to Lucy.

Lucy smiled and lifted up her shirt.

Amy cut through Lucy and the act calmed her. No longer was Amy the scared little girl in trouble before the headmistress. She was Amelia Hurst, the Vampire Thrall, once more.

Amy extracted Lucy’s still beating heart then said. “So what exactly am I going to do with this?”

The Bam-Kursh had put a stopper on the concoction she’d brewed up for Amy and she handed to Lucy while she pulled out a clear plastic zip lock bag for Amy to dump the beating heart into. “Dump the heart into the bath overnight and it’ll grow into a copy of Lucy by morning. After that, have fun and live the vegan life style.”

Amy laughed. “Yeah but, Alison, I won’t see her for so long and I can’t sell the Farsh-nuke out to Galla Placidia. Not to Galla Placidia. Not her. I accept this is not an offer I can really refuse but please don’t make me become the property of the woman who got him killed. I can’t do that, not even for Alison.”

The Bam-Kursh nodded then said. “If I help you and your new owner - whoever that turns out to be - consents, would you let me have a copy of you to turn into a toy?”

Amy looked at the Bam-Kursh and anger flared across her face, then she looked to Lucy and she swallowed nervously. “If you really believe I’ll consent to everything you ask of me and you really think I’ll be worth that effort you are more than willing to try but if I do agree to that I want more than just to not belong to Galla Placidia. I want to not belong to you, her or Pacifus Subis. I don’t trust either of them and I certainly don’t trust you. I will be the new Goddess and I will fight to stop the Farsh-nuke but I won’t kill him unless I have to in defence of those I care about.”

The Bam-Kursh nodded. “Exit through the gift shop, I’ll keep the deities off your back.”

“Thank you.” said Amy, relieved.

Lucy handed Amy a sports bag so Amy could transport the heart easier.

“Now you’re going to be going away for a long time so do what you have to do before you hand yourself in to the police again.” said the Bam-Kursh.

Lucy handed the vial to Amy. “You’ll have about 15 minutes to talk before the shrinking deteriorates her brain too much.”

“Thank you both ever so much...” said Amy then she turned, stowed the vial in a zip up pocket of her jacket and started running.

“Why did you give her your heart? You know she’s going to be out of action for 9 months.” asked the Bam-Kursh.

Lucy shrugged. “I thought she might get peckish on her journey.”

The Bam-Kursh laughed.

*

Alison lay back on her bed, one hand on a bottle of Smirnoff ICE, another in the hair of Lindsay, as the young man’s tongue worked a very particular kind of magic between her thighs.

Lindsay’s face rose from beneath her skirt and he licked his lips greedily. “What can I do next for you, Mistress?”

“Can we just snuggle for a bit?” asked Alison.

“I always like snuggling with you, Mistress.” said Lindsay resting his head on Alison’s chest.

Alison took another swig from her bottle and stroked Lindsay’s hair fondly. “I like you a lot you know, Lindsay.”

“Well I like you too, Mistress.” said Lindsay.

“I’m serious.” said Alison with a sigh.

Lindsay dropped the sugary tone from his voice and said more seriously. “Ally, you’re my best friend and I’m not saying this as your submissive, I’m saying that as Lindsay. I kind of in love you in a deep, not romantic, way.”

“You platonically love me even though we have sex?” asked Alison dubiously.

Lindsay nodded, the movement sending quakes through Alison’s flesh.

Alison smiled then she said. “Amy has a partner other than me and she wants to set me up with someone.”

“Well no offense but it wouldn’t feel right being your girlfriend.” said Lindsay. “Proper romantic love needs parity. I don’t want parity with you.”

Alison chuckled then set the bottle aside on the table and reached down to stroke Lindsay’s cheek. “No, I don’t think I could be your girlfriend either, you strike me more as a pet.”

Lindsay giggled. “Well you better be seeing me as a cat...”

“Yeah...” said Alison with a grin. “An adorable house cat that we give belly rubs too.”

There was a note of concern in his voice as Lindsay asked. “What kind of things have you been doing with your cats?”

“You know what I mean...” said Alison, a note of annoyance in her voice.

Lindsay giggled.

Alison swallowed and stared off into the distance. “But what if you learned things about us?”

“What kind of things?” asked Lindsay.

“What if we did things? Bad things?” asked Alison. “Things that make the drama of social media look tame.”

“Well I don’t really know.” said Lindsay. “I mean I know I had a friend who voted conservative once.”

“What happened?” asked Alison.

“He talked about his penis all the time. The moment he stopped being a good guy I decided the least I could do was find someone who wasn’t always talking abut their genitals.” said Lindsay.

“And then you met Amy.” said Alison.

Lindsay giggled. “I think my friend actually dated for her. Funny thing, I haven’t seen him since. I suppose she’s got him stashed somewhere in the country. Somewhere his stupidity can’t be too much of a nuisance and she can just enjoy his dick as and when she feels like it.”

Alison giggled. “Oh I can see that. Just has him chained to the bed like a living dildo.”

Lindsay cackled.

“So when did you and Amy get together?” asked Alison.

“Very next day actually.” said Lindsay wistfully. “She brought me deep fried sausage with chips when I was home ill. She said she wanted to apologise and didn’t realise what a raw deal I’d gotten. One thing led to another and then she was riding me like I was in the grand national.”

Alison smirked. “How was the sausage?”

“Bit chewy and bloody but what it lacked in quality it more than made up for in quantity.” said Lindsay.

Alison bit her lips, stroked Lindsay’s hair then reached for the bottle.

The doorbell rang and there was a series of loud knocking.

Lindsay rolled aside.

Alison went to answer the front door.

“Detective Inspector Tim Sheckle of the ECI Unusual Predators Division.” said the ogre in the doorway. “Might I have permission to search the premises?”

“Can I say no?” asked Alison.

“Well that depends...” said Sheckle with a grin. “At the moment I have you listed as a witness and victim of Miss Amelia Hurst, the Ghost of St Godwinsons, but if you’d like to claim responsibility for what we find inside you are free to change that?”

Alison swallowed. “Okay, I’ll come quietly.”

“You’re not under arrest.” said Sheckle as the armed police started swarming inside.

“No but I rather assume I am being taken into protective custody because if Amy’s been caught she will come to eat me.” said Alison.

“Oh yes...” said Sheckle. “Silly me, right this way, Miss.”

Alison was led into a van.

“We found this one hiding in the closet.” said a police officer as Lindsay cowered in his miniskirt and crop top.

“Hello...” said Sheckle, like the spider to the fly. “Lets go see what Bluebeard has squirrelled away shall we?”

*

Lindsay walked behind Sheckle through the house and into the basement.

“But that’s just the sex dungeon!” cried Lindsay, outraged.

“Sir!” called an officer beside a locked fridge.

Sheckle nodded.

The officer bashed the lock off the fridge. The fridge was stacked full with hands, feet and heads but one head in particular stood out to Lindsay. The top of the head had been removed and freezing had damaged the cells a little but it was noticeably the face of his old friend.

Lindsay vomited.

“Well he’s innocent.” said Sheckle with a smirk.

*

“So you know when you asked if I could still like you if you did something a bit bad?” asked Lindsay angrily as he and Sheckle entered the police van.

Alison nodded and braced for a punch.

Lindsay said acidly. “I think on further reflection the answer is no. No, I would not forgive you and no, I would not still like you and -” Then he cried out. “Oh my god! Amy was going to eat me wasn’t she!?”

Sheckle grinned proudly.

Alison sighed.

The police van drove off.

*

Claudia was relieved by the sight of her large home when she returned from the pub. She unlocked the door, stepped inside, pulled the door shut behind her then turned on the light switch.

“Hello.” said Amy as she sat on the stairs, eating a packet of crisps.

*

Fifteen minutes later Claudia handed Amy a large backpack of clothes and toiletries. “There, now you have enough to go on the run with that pet moron of yours. Go.”

“Thank you kindly.” said Amy with a grin. “Although there is one last thing.”

“No, you can’t eat me.” said Claudia flatly. “I’ve taken down worse.”

Amy smirked. “No. I need someone to look after Alison when I’m gone because I am going to be gone for such a long while.”

“I assumed you were going to eat her before the police caught up with you.” said Claudia.

“No.” said Amy firmly. “I love Alison. I see that now. I love her and I have cultivated an incredibly endearing and adorable obsession within her. I would love to run away with her now but it wouldn’t be right and it wouldn’t be fair. I am going to say goodbye to her but I want someone I can trust to look after her, continue her training and teach her to stand on her own to feet.”

Claudia stared. “Are you asking me to be your mother-in-law?”

Amy smiled. “Well, more like my dog sitter but same difference. Alison is my little honeybee and I am her spider. I will devour her one day but I need to do so as equals. While I go off to become the plaything of a deity Alison deserves to learn how to be a queen from an empress.”

Claudia was taken aback but she smiled then nodded. “It will be an honour.”

“Break my programming if you can. She deserves a fresh start at life untainted by me. She deserves to be a person again.” said Amy.

“I’ll do my best.” said Claudia, then she reached out a hand.

“Thank you.” said Amy. “For what it’s worth I have always considered you a friend.”

Claudia smiled. “Where will you go now?”

“I made Alison a promise, I intend to stick to it.” said Amy.

*

“How long are you going to keep us here?” asked Alison.

“Long as it takes...” said Sheckle with a grin.

“She can stay with me tonight.” said Pacifus Subis as she entered the room. “You are not making the victim sleep in the cells while the predator sleeps free. Not on my watch.”

“So Amy is free?” asked Alison.

Pacifus nodded. “Seems she got a better deal from the Bam-Kursh but don’t worry. She’ll be back tomorrow.”

“Back for what?” asked Alison.

“Do you really have to ask...” said Pacifus with a chuckle.

Alison swallowed nervously.

“Come now, child...” said Pacifus as she offered her hand.

*

Amy entered the bathroom of the bed and breakfast the next morning.

Lucy lay naked in the bath tub. “Thought you’d never accept me.”

Amy laughed then she chucked some clothes at Lucy. “Sorry if things don’t fit, wasn’t exactly able to get your measurements properly before leaving.”

Lucy laughed and pulled on a tank stop, a skirt and a pair of canvas shoes. “I’ll do, lets get going. I assume we are headed for Alison?”

“Haha, yeah...” said Amy then she scratched the back of her neck awkwardly. “Slight detour.”

“Where are we then?” asked Lucy.

“Pictland.” said Amy.

“Why are we in Pictland?” asked Lucy.

“Well have you ever read any George RR Martin?” asked Amy.

*

“Do you, Abigail Diana Williams, take Petrichor Geronimo Summers to be your lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold, as long as you both shall live?” asked the vicar.

“I do.” said the tall, slender, young, white Vligury with long, flame red, curly hair, wearing a burgundy suit.

“And do you, Petrichor Geronimo Summers, take Abigail Diana Williams to be your lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold, as long as you both shall live?” asked the vicar.

“I do.” said the short, skinny, young, dark skinned Vligury with long, chestnut brown, straight hair, wearing a white wedding dress with a long silken train.

“Then by the power invested in me as a vicar of the church of Nigel I pronounce you as wife and wife. You may now kiss the bride.” said the vicar.

Abigail cleared the hair from Petrichor’s face then smiled.

Petrichor reached out with her hands and pulled Abigail into a dip.

“Kiss me.” said Abigail as she looked up into Petrichor’s eyes.

So Petrichor did.

After a minute they stopped kissing and there was loud raucous applause.

“You’re supposed to turn up before we marry.” said Abigail and Petrichor in unison when they saw Amy was applauding.

“As if I would ever do that.” said Amy scoldingly, a smirk upon her lips.

“What is it you want, Miss?” asked Abigail.

“Just a favour.” said Amy with a smile. “Just one teensy tiny little favour.”

“If it’s a threesome you want, Miss, I think the answer is yes.” said Petrichor with a smile.

Abigail giggled.

“Little bit more than a threesome.” said Amy.

“I don’t think they do poly marriages here.” said Abigail.

“I think I best explain.” said Amy. “But I think you want to sit down and have some stiff drinks to hand first.”

“If you think it’s best.” said Petrichor.

*

“What took you so long?” asked Lucy when Amy finally arrived at their rendezvous point. A cafe a mile away.

Amy’s face went pink. “I could hardly leave the offer of a threesome from a couple of former playthings sitting on the table now could I?”

“You fucked ’em?” asked Lucy incredulously. “You told me you were going in there to murder them. Won’t your little three way have rather left evidence behind?”

“Oh yeah...” said Amy with a grin. “But I’ve got my get out of jail free card, haven’t I?”

Lucy groaned. “Mistress, I gave myself to you as a gift to do with as you wish but is it so much to ask that you abide by your own standards?”

Amy smirked. “Come on, lets get moving. My love awaits.”

*

Sheckle arrived later to find a tableau waiting for him.

There was a ginger woman on her hands and knees. Sheckle would have said all fours only she had gained an extra set of arms and legs. They were stitched to her like the limbs of the Frankenshark and like the Frankenshark she was held in position by fishing line hanging from the ceiling.

Also like the Frankenshark, the ginger woman was posed before a meal composed of a limbless woman. Except where the other had been roasted and displayed on a platter, this woman was bound tightly in a silk wedding dress, the train hanging out around her like spider’s web.

People in hazmat suits moved around the church, cataloguing the crime scene.

Suddenly both victims gasped for air.

“Medic!” cried Sheckle.

“Have you taken the photos?” asked the spider woman.

*

Lucy ran into the police station missing her left arm “Oh god! Oh god, help me! Amy! Amy, she’s gone fucking mad! Please. you’ve got to stop her!”

The police ran forward to help Lucy while Amy quietly snuck past in an officer’s uniform. It was not a tactic that would work well, nor for long, but it didn’t need to. Amy skimmed the sign in sheet, grabbed the relevant key then hurried past.

Alison rose to her feet when she saw Amy. “This is a trap. They’re trying to trap you.”

“Well duh...” said Amy. She pulled the vial from her pocket as she unlocked the door. “We’re going to need to run. Can you drink this?”

“Sure, what does it do?” asked Alison, accepting the vial.

“Cooks you from the inside out.” said Amy glibly as she opened the cell door and led Alison away down the hallway.

“Neat.” said Alison as she removed the stopper then knocked back the potion as they walked. She gagged slightly but swallowed it all down. “Take away for the road, I like it. So where are we headed?”

“Away...” said Amy, leading them deeper into the station.

“Yeah but where what’s the plan? Coastland? Galiatep? The Dwarven Forges? Where are we running to?” asked Alison as she tossed the empty vial in a rubbish bin they passed.

“This is the plan.” said Amy as she flung open the door to an interview room.

Alison ran inside. “This is the plan?”

Amy went inside with her then closed and locked the door after. “Yup, this is the plan.”

“But how are you going to get away?” asked Alison.

“I’m not.” said Amy as she grabbed the table and pushed it against the door.

“Why would you head it into a trap with no way out?” asked Alison, sweat was starting to glisten on her forehead.

Amy turned to Alison and reached out one hand to her waist and another to stroke her face. “I came to say goodbye. I don’t get to run away from this. Not this time.”

“But you’re invincible.” said Alison. “They told me you got away by negotiating a better deal with the deities.”

“I did.” said Amy. “I negotiated this. I negotiated closure between us.”

“But -” said Alison then she realized the truth of what Amy had said earlier. “You really are cooking me, aren’t you?”

Amy nodded. Her eyes started to water. “I said I would cook you, Alison, and I meant it, had I more time I would do this properly but I don’t.”

“Are you really going to kill me?” asked Alison.

Amy shook her head. “I could never do that. You’ll live but you won’t ever see me again. I’m going to go far away, I’m going to train to become a god killer and I won’t look for you or come for you. This is goodbye, Alison.”

“But I love you.” said Alison

Amy took Alison’s face in her hands. “I promised I would cook you and this is me cooking you, Alison. Can you feel it? Can you feel me burning you?”

Alison nodded. “It hurts.”

“Good.” said Amy with a sad smile. “Remember that pain when the memory of me makes you hunger for my command of you. Remember that I am the monster and you are the victim and our love was not right.”

Tears were streaming down Alison’s face. “Kill me then. Just kill me and get it over with.”

“I am killing you.” said Amy then she kissed Alison on the lips.

The kiss became a snog and when the kissing stopped, Alison was steaming.

“I hurt so much, you evil witch.” said Alison angrily. “Why couldn’t you just butcher me like you

planned to on our first date?"

"Because this is how it has to end, Alison..." said Amy as she sat cross legged on the floor. "With me watching you burn in agony. There could be no other way."

Alison sat down opposite Amy. "Well, I hope you're happy. I hope you are very happy, you fucking witch. I loved you and I protected you and you have taken everything from me, you murderous monster."

Amy nodded, tears streamed down her face. "Oh, I am happy. This is my victory, Honey. I have defeated you utterly and now I cast you out into the world, broken and beaten."

"I can feel myself losing my mind." said Alison. "Bits of memories, words and ideas lost to the heat and the pain."

"Every cell in your body is on fire and trying to hold you together as your biomass shrinks. The simpler muscles can adapt with relative ease to a decrease in cellular make up but the brain is losing neurons, soon your ability to form speech will disappear entirely." explained Amy.

Alison stared at Amy. "Do you have to take everything from me?"

Amy smiled. "Always, Honey, always."

And then the screaming began.

Amy sat in silence, tears and snot streaming down her face, as she watched Alison burn away to the size of a doll.

Finally Amy picked up the tiny squirming thing that used to be Alison and she rose to her feet.

Sheckle stood in the doorway with Claudia.

Amy handed the tiny thing to Claudia.

The Bam-Kursh laid a hand on Amy's shoulder. "Come on."

Amy looked to the Bam-Kursh and nodded.

The Bam-Kursh warped time and space around them until they found themselves at the home of Viorum Kaztif-tan

It was a large palatial house with an Olympic sized swimming pool, gym, sauna, stables and a dining hall fit for a medieval banquet.

Viorum Kaztif-tan wore a dark brown suit and stood beside Lucy, who was now dressed in a tailored green bikini. They stood in the center of a large bedroom with an impressive looking entertainment system.

"Pleased to meet you, Amy. It is an honour to take a powerful individual such as yourself into my care. I am afraid however that there has been a change of plan." said Viorum sweetly.

"What?" said Amy confused.

Viorum smiled politely. “Your friend here told me about how your deal was struck. I am your commander I do not consent to you burning up and becoming a toy for the Bam-Kursh.”

Amy looked first to Viorum then to Lucy and finally to the Bam-Kursh. “Are you okay with this?”

Viorum looked to the Bam-Kursh.

The Bam-Kursh shrugged. “My business relies upon the unbreakability of my contracts. Your new owner has the right to deny our deal. Enjoy your training won’t you?”

“Thank you.” said Viorum.

Amy smiled. “So what happens now?”

“I’ll give you tour.” said Viorum.

*

Epilogue
Technically It’s Farce

Seven years later Amy Hurst stood on the prow of a ferry arriving at Shlattensberg from the mainland of Darkish. She was dressed in a black three piece suit with jade green pinstripes and trainers in a cream white. Her flame red hair hung down her waist. She took a deep breath of the chill night air and smiled.

*

Claudia M Green left the pub and staggered down the darkened alleyways towards her home. She spotted a figure lurking in the shadows and broke out in hysterics. She stumbled into some bins and apologised to thin air as she picked up the lid then carried on staggering through the alleyway.

Claudia was almost upon the shadowy figure now and she smiled with the experienced satisfaction of a seasoned huntress.

Amy jumped down from the rooftop behind Claudia.

Claudia turned instinctively at the sound.

Amy pulled out a lighter and ignited a spark of bright orange flame between them. “Hello, Claudia.”

Claudia grinned. “Hello, Professor, may I take the fact that I am still breathing as a sign that you don’t plan to kill me?”

Amy chuckled. “I don’t plan on killing anyone any more but I couldn’t resist the opportunity to give you a fright.”

“So not entirely reformed then.” said Claudia with a grin. “Good.”

“Come n, lets get you safely home.” said Amy.

“Where my kitchen is.” noted Claudia with a chuckle.

*

“One entirely vegan meal for my Elven friend.” said Amy with pride as she laid the meal out before Claudia.

“You not eating?” asked Claudia as she looked upon the colourful plate of food before her.

Amy smiled. “I’m saving myself for something big.”

“So why didn’t you ever eat me?” asked Claudia idly.

Amy shrugged. “I like you.”

Claudia nodded then smiled as she tucked into the meal gladly.

“You know why I’m here of course?” asked Amy.

Claudia nodded as she ate.

“Do I have your permission?” asked Amy.

Claudia almost choked on her food then coughed, cleared her throat and asked. “It’s not my business.”

Amy smiled politely then said. “Claudia, you are a friend and as such I care about your feelings. I left Alison in your care and I am not blind to the possibility that you may have grown quite attached to her.”

“Well I don’t think you’re going to kill her now are you?” asked Claudia with an amused smile.

“No.” said Amy flatly.

“Then enjoy each other. Alison’s life is her own to lead.” said Claudia.

“Thank you.” said Amy genuinely.

“Then come on, tell all, what has the great spider been up to?” asked Claudia digging into her food.

Amy smiled. “I have a very nice Commander called Viorum, I think you’d like them. They helped me see that part of what I liked about Alison was that I could recognise myself in her, recognise the other life I could have lived.” Amy’s face flushed pink. “Hardly the great spider anymore...”

So Claudia and Amy talked and their strange friendship was rekindled but built anew. Gone were the lies, gone was the fear, now there was only honesty and an honesty and trust all the greater for having seen the depths of each other’s darkness.

*

Amy unlocked the door to her old house. It was dusty and lined with cobwebs. Amy almost smiled

at the appropriateness of that as she toured the house examining the damage.

The ECI had seized the house as evidence while they dissected every inch of it. Amy may have done a deal with the deities to earn her salvation but the house had still allowed thousands of missing persons cases to be closed and families to move on. Not least because Amy insisted on keeping records of everyone she ever killed for posterity and an eye to leveraging the evidence for possible future use.

Amy headed for the kitchen first and she almost cried when she saw it. So many happy memories in this place and it had clearly been taken apart then put back together, almost but not quite exactly the same. She headed to the basement next.

Amy fell to her knees. The basement was a shell, a barren husk. Everything had been carted away as evidence. Everything. Even the upper layers of the concrete floor had been carted away.

“I’m sorry, I tried to talk them into putting it back together.” said Galla Placidia. She stood beside Amy in the dark of the room.

“This was my home.” said Amy weakly. “I know I was evil but this was my home.”

“You’re going to be cooking soon, aren’t you?” asked Galla Placidia.

Amy sighed. “I had hoped to.”

“You know I worried when you escaped that you were going to kill that poor girl.” said Galla Placidia.

“Never.” said Amy firmly.

Galla Placidia nodded then she asked. “What do you need?”

Amy wanted to rage, she wanted to scream about why anyone would offer to help her, she wanted to ask for catches, she wanted to read the terms and conditions. Instead she said. “I need knives and saws. I need slaughter saline and a drip stand. I need a pump to collect the juices and I need a new throne for my Queen, one made of metal with straps but above all I need another fridge and another freezer.”

“Enjoy her.” said Galla Placidia and then she was gone.

“Right...” said Amy as she rose to her feet. “Come on Professor, there’s work to do.”

So Amy worked. She worked through the night, cleaning the house. She checked over the plumbing and electrics then worked on the first draft of her shopping list for the next day.

*

Alison dreamed. It was a very familiar dream.

She stood beside Amy on the edge of a cliff, looking with satisfaction at the corpse of a man they had killed together.

“This is what I’ve always wanted for us.” said Amy as she put an arm round Alison’s shoulders.

Alison nuzzled Amy then said. “It’s where we’ve always been going.” Then she wrapped her arms tight about Amy.

“I think Obtland next.” said Amy wistfully. “I’ve always wondered what a Queen tastes like.”

Alison pulled Amy down with her off the cliff.

*

Amy woke to the doorbell ringing. She staggered bleary eyed and went to answer the door. “Alright, alright, what’s the fire?”

“Someone ordered a throne?” asked a tall broad shouldered green orc in a high vis jacket.

“Umm, yeah, I did I think. It goes in the basement.” said Amy, still half asleep.

“And I assume that’ll be the same for all the other items.” said the orc.

“Sure...” said Amy, kind of confused. She watched the various orcs, ogres and goblins carry fridges, freezers and knives inside the house.

“Can I buy you a coffee?” asked a familiar female voice.

Amy turned to see Pacifus Subus, beautiful as ever, in a pastel dress. She stared in shock.

“Cof- fee?” said Pacifus slowly. “Are you alright?”

“I ran from your deal and burned your champion alive, how are you not outrageously angry?” asked Amy.

Pacifus smirked. “Amy, one thing you need to understand is that wrathful deities do not last long. You are far from the only serial killer the Mundis Turpis has ever had.”

“Then coffee would be great.” said Amy with a smile.

*

Amy sipped the frappe latte and she could feel the flickering embers of her energy reignited. “So to what do I owe the honour?”

Pacifus sipped at her green tea and smiled. “Any fool could see what you were planning from a mile away and I wanted to give you my blessing.”

Amy smiled. “So may I take it that Claudia has spoken to Alison about me.”

Pacifus shook her head. “Your lamb sleeps soundly, shepherd.”

Amy swallowed nervously. “It’s going to be today, isn’t it?”

“Why are you asking me?” asked Pacifus.

Amy shrugged. “You know Alison better than I do.”

“Perhaps...” said Pacifus with a smile. “But her heart belongs to you.”

“Even now?” asked Amy doubtfully.

“I believe so.” said Pacifus.

Amy sat back and let out a long slow exhale. “Shit...”

“So, what do you want?” asked Pacifus.

Amy stared at Pacifus.

“What?” asked Pacifus.

“Sorry... Been watching a lot of scifi lately.” said Amy dismissively. “Forget it I’m tired and confused.”

Pacifus chuckled. “What I meant was, how may I help you?”

Amy smirked. “You want to help me with - Umm...”

“Of course.” said Pacifus earnestly. “You are where my champion is headed. You deserve the finest tools and equipment with which to facilitate her becoming.”

Amy nodded. “I’d like a new kitchen. I want precise, high tech, electronic scales, blenders, mixing bowls, hobs, ovens, microwaves. I want to be able to put on a banquet but I’d like it to look rustic and homely. I want the power but not to intimidate.”

Pacifus nodded. “Enjoy your coffee.”

Then Pacifus was gone.

*

Alison got dressed in a pink dress and pink shoes then examined herself in the mirror.

The great red spider hung from the ceiling behind Alison, visible in the mirror.

Alison ignored it then placed a pink bow hairclip in her hair. She smiled at herself then went to work.

*

Amy toured the shopping mall and picked up things to help with the coming meal.

*

Alison stood before the lecture hall. “Apex Predators.” Alison flashed through a series of slides. “The lion. The shark. The spider. The dragon.” She pressed through to a slide of a daisy with a red question mark over the top. “What do they all have in common?”

Claudia entered the lecture theatre. The lights were off and no students were around. She raised a hand.

Alison grinned. “Yes, person at the back.”

“They all rely on the survival of herbivores for their own sustenance.” said Claudia.

Alison scowled. “See the lesson doesn’t work when you already know the answer...”

Claudia chuckled as she approached. “Well that’s a lesson for you right there. Sometimes there will be students who already know the answers and you have to create a lesson plan that accommodates them as well.”

Alison smiled and bowed her head. “Yes, Miss.”

Claudia settled into a seat in the front row then said. “You’re doing marvellous, sweetie.”

“Thanks...” said Alison with a grin.

“Why don’t you try it again but this time use the question as a jumping off point to discuss other parts of the lesson?” said Claudia. “Modularity is your friend, just tick off what you’ve already covered.”

“Okay...” said Alison, moving the presentation back a few slides before announcing bombastically. “Apex Predators...”

*

Amy arrived home with several bags filled with groceries. As she fumbled with the door, hands reached out to take the bags from her.

Amy unlocked the door and pushed it open then looked to see Viorum Kaztif-tan stood rather sheepishly beside her, carrying her bags, dressed in their customary dark brown suit.

“I should have known you’d turn up.” said Amy with a grin.

Viorum grinned. “Could hardly let Galla and Pacifus be the only ones to help you now could I?”

“I was supposed to do this on my own.” said Amy. “That’s why I came back here, it has to matter.”

Viorum nodded. “Why don’t we put these away and then we can talk about it over some tea?”

Amy laughed. “Alright.”

So they packed the groceries away in the freshly restored basement then headed to the - as yet untouched - kitchen for tea.

Once the kettle had brewed and the tea bags were stewing they headed into the living room with their mugs.

“So...?” said Viorum, resting their mug on the floor as they sat gingerly on a dissected then

reconstructed sofa.

Amy sat her mug on the floor then sat nervously on a similarly reconstructed armchair. “So this is important to me.”

“I know and I respect that.” said Viorum. “It’s why I let you come here on your own, without even Lucy.”

“But you’re my Commander and you can’t let the people I ran from feel smug about being the only ones to help.” said Amy with a sigh. “I do get the real politik going on here.”

“It’s not just the politics.” said Viorum. “I have a duty of care and you are sleep deprived and going without solids.”

“I’m a Vampire Thrall, I can take it.” said Amy irritably.

“I know...” said Viorum quietly. They sighed then said. “I think you have proven yourself useful, I think you have proven yourself a valuable champion of light. I think you are mighty and wonderful and at times incredibly kind but I am not a fool, Amy. In this tiny little pond you are one of the bigger fish and I have helped you grow bigger still. You are a danger to these people and I need you to know that if things get too much and you feel the old ways reasserting themselves I can and will whisk you away in a heartbeat.”

“I’m not going to go darkside.” said Amy quietly.

Viorum laughed bitterly then said. “You’re here to eat the woman who made you go lightside and now your murder house is being refurbished. The potential is there and with the potential comes the temptation to seize it.”

Amy closed her eyes then said quietly. “I am still your soft snuggle bug, Commander, I’m still me. I’m just trying on old clothes again.”

“Good.” said Viorum then they pat the seat beside them on the sofa. “Then let me have my pet again for a few minutes.”

Amy rose from the armchair she took her tea with her then took a seat beside Viorum.

“You’re a good girl, Amy.” said Viorum reaching an arm round Amy’s shoulders.

“What if she says no?” asked Amy. “What if she never wants to see me again?”

“Then she will be missing out on experiencing the best knife work this side of the Blood Peaks.” said Viorum proudly.

“I wouldn’t blame her if she never wanted to see me again.” said Amy.

“I know, Snuggle Bug, I know.” said Viorum compassionately.

“Would it be entirely bad form for me to strip?” asked Amy quietly as she nuzzled Viorum’s chest. “This suit is so uncomfortable for snuggles.”

“Not at all.” said Viorum quietly. “And you are with your Commander, Snuggle Bug, no

explanations are necessary."

"I am the great red spider." said Amy in a soft sleepy tone of voice as she removed her tie. "I am the ghost of St Godwinsons, the butcher of bimbos everywhere."

"I know..." said Viorum compassionately as Amy stripped herself of the suit and curled up on Viorum's lap. "You are the night and the storm at the heart of the sun."

"I am the devil come to Shlattensberg." whimpered Amy before sucking her thumb.

"And you are best girl ever, soft Snuggle Bug." said Viorum proudly as they stroked Amy's flanks lovingly.

*

"Now one last question." asked Alison. "How do you stop a predator?"

A young, curvy, black Vligury with braided hair, wearing jeans and a band jacket held up a hand.

Alison nodded her on.

"You don't, Miss." said the student sagely.

The other students laughed.

Alison barked sharply "SILENCE!!!"

The lecture hall fell silent.

Alison looked back to the student who had asked the question. "I believe you had something you wanted to say?"

"Yeah..." said the student earnestly. "You don't stop a Predator, not an old school one. They know your weaknesses, they can read it in your eyes, they know what you want and so they will only go after you if they think they can make what you want what they want. Sure you can run. You can save yourself, let the Predator get someone else but you don't ever stop them."

Alison clapped. "Round of applause for the smartest student I have ever yet come across!"

Applause went round the lecture hall and the student bowed to accept the applause of her peers.

"There is no way to stop a Predator." said Alison firmly. "I can speak from experience that you can run and you can fall in love with them but they will get you. They will always get you. And not even the deities can stop them."

A hand shot up at the back.

"Oh and it looks like we have one brave soul looking to disagree from the cheap seats. Well step forward so we might all share in your grand wisdom, maestro!" said Alison triumphantly.

"Love." said Amy, stepping out of the shadows, back in her black suit with the jade green pinstripes. "Love is how you stop a predator."

Alison stared.

Amy kept walking. “You should know and I don’t think you give yourself enough credit. You used love like a weapon and you butchered me like I butchered other students of this very university. So bravo, Professor Benchley! Bravo! You are the white knight and the sacrificial lamb who died to save others from your own fate! Bravo, madam!”

Amy clapped.

Claudia had arrived with Amy and she started a round of applause now.

“You said you wouldn’t come for me.” said Alison quietly.

“I lied.” said Amy quietly.

“You burned me.” said Alison.

Amy looked away. “I’m sorry. I could explain but I am still sorry.”

The bell rang and Claudia ushered the students away.

“Fuck.” said Alison quietly.

“Can I buy you a coffee?” asked Amy.

“Oh god yes.” said Alison as she rushed to embrace Amy. “I’ve missed you so much, you evil woman.”

Amy smiled. “You think it’s a shame there’s no cliff to toss me off from?”

Alison looked up at Amy. “How did you know about that?”

Amy looked down at Alison and smirked. “You really don’t know?”

Alison shook her head.

*

“Bryan-fucking-Fuller.” said Alison angrily.

Amy and Alison were in a booth at Avons with coffees.

“I like the ending.” said Amy.

“But how do they survive?” asked Alison.

“The same way all heroes and villains survive seemingly certain death.” said Amy.

“That is not an answer I am willing to accept.” said Alison.

“Okay, the shed, in invisible mode, parked sideways to catch them in the swimming pool.” said

Amy.

“Hang on, why are we talking about this?” asked Alison angrily. “The last time I saw you you burned me alive.”

“Would it make a difference if I pointed out that the fate you experienced was the one I was then going to go on to experience immediately myself?” said Amy quietly.

“No!” barked Alison angrily then she closed her eyes and sighed. “Maybe.” She held up thumb and forefinger and said. “Little bit.”

“Also I was going away for a long time and it was all basically down to you.” said Amy with a shrug. “I didn’t know how much of that was down to you manipulating me and how much was down to you genuinely being besotted with me but either way I owed you a defeat, I owed you a fall and reason to carry on with the rest of your life without me.”

“I wasn’t manipulating you.” said Alison.

Amy stared at Alison and sipped her coffee.

“Okay so I was trying a little bit at the beginning but it was a stupid plan and it shouldn’t have worked.” said Alison. “I mean as plans go. ‘If I am really eager to be eaten maybe the sadistic vampire will be put off.’ is up there with ‘Invading Wagnaria In The Winter’ for plans least likely to succeed.”

“But that’s why it worked.” said Amy with a smirk. “I thought you had to be genuine because the idea that it might be manipulation was such an insanely stupid idea.”

“Okay, so I’ll give you that hurting me like that probably was in a bizarre way a very kind thing to do because hate can be empowering in a way while unfulfilled desire just hurts.” said Alison. “I still think you were bloody mean but I can see your reasoning, especially if you thought you’d been played and wanted some revenge but you say I stopped you? How? How did I have anything to do with that?”

“Do you remember the first time you hurt Lindsay with your magic?” asked Amy. “Do you remember what we were doing when you tried that?”

“Yeah...” said Alison with a shrug. “We cut his leg off and I tried to heal it with my powers but that didn’t work.”

“Do you remember why we did that though?” asked Amy.

“Well yeah...” said Alison casually. “We were trying to find the third way. We hoped that if I could heal him up then you could harvest him for meat without killing him.”

Amy nodded then said. “Alison, they offered me the third way.”

“They’ve given you healing powers?” asked Alison.

Amy shook her head then leaned over the table. “The potion that you took turned you into a Sylph. You have submissiveness because of that. You became a pet because of that but more importantly, your Sylph submissiveness means you can become a wereshark without succumbing to the

weaknesses of a wereshark. You can keep your sanity and your minds and be a wereshark."

"Yeah but weresharks are just people. There's nothing special about them." said Alison. "I know because one of the victims of the puppeteer killer was turned into a wereshark. Sure they can transform but they can still die."

"Only if you destroy all of their hearts." said Amy. "Trust me I've seen it happen, I've got a girl back home that I eat on a regular basis."

"Oh shit." said Alison quietly.

"That's why you stopped me." said Amy. "Because they made me an offer I could not refuse, they gave me a way to let you survive being eaten alive."

Alison was horrified. "You came back to eat me after all..."

Amy grimaced. "You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. I'm not going to make you do anything you don't want to do. But yes, that's part of why I gave you the potion then. Because I knew I would come back to make you a most indecent proposal and you'd be even less likely to say yes if I was like 'But first you must drink this disgusting thing that will burn you alive...'"

Alison nodded. "And the nine month wait raising me back to sanity would really put a dampener on the dinner plans."

Amy bit her lip to stop from laughing.

"Hold on, you've got another girl?" asked Alison annoyed. "I thought I was your one and only playful snack."

Amy snorted then said. "Honey, I've always eaten other people and I told you I had a partner, you were okay with that."

"Yeah, but I'm the bee in your web that you've always wanted to devour but kept alive for the company." said Alison with a smile. "Who is this rival to your blood lust affections?"

"Lucy Danse." said Amy with a grin.

"Not..." said Alison.

"The Lucy Danse from the Silfavorecon." said Amy proudly. "I mean okay not THE Lucy Danse. She gave me one of her hearts so technically I have a cutting but still..."

"I can't compete with the lamb of god." said Alison. "I'm surprised you've even remembered me."

"Oh, I could never forget you." said Amy earnestly.

"Neither could I." said Alison with a smile.

"Honey, I didn't come here on a whim. My training is complete and I am about to be sent off as an official agent of the Darkish Secret Service." said Amy.

"You're going to be a spy?" asked Alison impressed then she smirked. "That's so hot."

Amy laughed.

Alison grinned.

Amy said quietly. “It’s going to be dangerous and you will be targetted because I care about you. I would prefer it if you were a wereshark.”

Alison nodded. “And if you have to give me the secret to the third way, why not ask if I want to enjoy the fruits of it with you?”

Amy nodded then she bit her lip.

“You don’t need to keep secrets from me, not any more.” said Alison, reassuringly as she reached out to squeeze Amy’s arm affectionately. “I mean you can’t get much more shocking than asking to eat me alive can you.”

“I want to own you.” said Amy, her voice nearly cracking as she looked at Alison.

Alison swallowed and her eyes widened. “You always manage to prove me wrong.”

Amy coughed then said. “It’s, umm - It’s one of my perks a Goddess in training.

“I have a life here.” said Alison firmly. “You gave me a life here.”

“Then come to dinner.” said Amy pleadingly. “Just come to dinner and if you change your mind we can adapt.”

“On one condition.” said Alison with a smile.

“Anything.” said Amy earnestly. “And I belong to a god so I fucking mean that.”

“I can say stop at any point and you stop.” said Alison. “If I don’t give an enthusiastic yes at the end of the night, you don’t get to eat me. Even if I have been saying yes all night long and I fall asleep before the point in the night when you ask me for final confirmation.”

“Absolutely.” said Amy, smiling. “I would never want you to come to my table unwillingly.”

“Then shall we say midnight?” asked Alison. “Time for us both to get some rest and prepare properly for the occasion.”

Amy nodded. “Midnight, midnight is good. Why midnight?”

“Because we’ll be halfway out of the dark.” said Alison. “And it means we can have tomorrow to enjoy what you have harvested.”

“You’re staying the night?” asked Amy, shocked.

Alison stared at Amy. “No, I’m going to call a cab to come take me home after I have been reduced to a set of giblets in a bowl. Of course I’m staying the night, Amy. I may change my mind but I will clear my schedule just in case.”

Amy grinned, face flushed pink. “See you at midnight then.”

Alison grinned. “Any requests?”

“Wear pink.” said Amy. “It suits you.”

Alison nodded. “Pink, it is.” then she rose to her feet “See you later.”

Amy rose and sidled away from the table.

The two women embraced as equals then Alison left.

*

Alison returned to Claudia’s stately home and found Claudia in the kitchen looking over recipes.

“So Amy’s back.” said Alison.

Claudia focused on the recipes. “Is she really?”

“She wants to own me.” said Alison.

“Good for her.” said Claudia, still not looking up.

“And I’m going round hers tonight to be eaten, she wants me to wear pink.” said Alison.

Claudia turned, ecstatic and hugged Alison. “Oh, I’m so happy for you. We are going to feed you a flavourful appetiser to enhance your meat. You are going to take a shower with unscented soaps so that you are completely clear of anything dirty or inedible and then we are giving you a full colonic irrigation so your bum is nice and clean for any stuffing Amy may want to give you.”

Alison blushed. “Miss, you’re a bit keen aren’t you?”

“I’ve been waiting for this day for a rather long time with great anticipation.” said Claudia with a smile. “Your life is your own to live but I figured this point in the path of your life was inevitable at some point.”

“Is it bad that I kind of want to let Amy own me even though I know she’s like, evil and stuff?” asked Alison.

“Not at all.” said Claudia cheerily. “I’ll talk to my lawyer see if we can’t come up with a way to let Amy own you without you being entirely screwed if Amy goes darkside.”

“Awesome.” said Alison. “What do I do now then?”

“Go to my room and strip off. I’ll be along to give you a full body massage once your flavouring is on the heat.” said Claudia.

Alison strode off cheerfully.

*

Amy walked home and found three deities waiting for her.

“Well?” asked Viorum Kaztif-tan.

“How did it go?” asked Galla Placidia.

“Will you be eating tonight?” asked Pacifus Subis.

“She said yes.” said Amy with a smile.

Viorum Kaztif-tan wrapped their arms round Amy and kissed her on the forehead. “Congratulations, snugglebug.”

“You deserve each other.” said Galla Placidia, patting Amy on the back.

“Eat well.” said Pacifus Subis proudly.

Amy giggled. Skin flushed lilac from excitement. “She actually fucking said yes.”

“We will leave you alone now.” said Viorum Kaztif-tan, releasing Amy. “But you say a prayer and I am sure we will all be here. I know I certainly will.”

“Thanks, you’ve been more help than I deserve.” said Amy.

“The deities keep their promises.” said Galla Placidia.

“And we promised you a happy ending.” said Pacifus Subis.

And then Amy was alone in the dark of her living room.

And so the Great Red Spider examined her new lair. The kitchen had received its upgrade. There was a new sofa and new armchairs in the living room, a new table and new chairs in the dining room, including a much more intimate smaller dining table for two. There was a new bed upstairs and someone had redone the bathroom. The only thing lacking was a chair for Amy as she drained the life from her prey as they sat strapped to the throne in the basement but a stool would do for now.

Amy cracked out the recipe books. Time to prepare for the feast she’d spent a decade looking forward to.

*

Alison lay back as water thundered up her spout, washing away the waste that coated her insides and she dreamed.

Alison dreamed she was lying half submerged on a beach as the devil and the great red spider bickered over what to do with her.

“Alison manipulated you, that was very rude. She deserves to die. You must eat her if you are to forgive her.” said the devil.

“The Honeybee is dangerous, to herself and to others. Her sting will disembowel her. She must be

confined for her own protection.” said the great red spider fondly. “Let her be bound in silk and allowed to live.”

“What if you’re both right?” asked Alison.

“How can they both be right?” asked a zombie fisherman floating in the river. “A person can’t be both alive and dead at the same time?”

“But what about the third way?” asked Alison.

A monstrous shark stuck its head out of the water. “The third way is hell and you do not want that.”

“What if she does?” asked the devil. “Not every little girl needs to know the way back home.”

“I will not allow my Honeybee to spend eternity burning.” said the great red spider.

“Goodness is a choice.” said the zombie fisherman. “You can’t force someone to be something they’re not. She has to choose to go to heaven.”

“Why would she choose anything but heaven?” asked the Great White Shark.

*

Amy examined herself in the mirror. She was dressed in a black three piece suit with black brogued shoes. She straightened her tie. It was a very dark chocolate brown and she sported a thick knot. She had showered with essence of mint and ginger, her hair stood out like vibrant flames, the red of her lipstick like blood against the paleness of her skin. She smiled. The Mistress smiled back at her.

The doorbell rang and Amy strode calmly to answer.

Alison was revealed in the doorway. She looked incongruously bright and innocent, this slight thing with a sweet little smile, delicate ankles atop fragile looking heels and a pink bow in her hair. She held her hands behind her back and looked brightly up at Amy.

“You look adorable” said Amy, taken aback.

“You don’t look so bad yourself.” said Alison with a smile.

“Well come on in then.” said Amy with a smile and she stood back and waved her on. “I trust you remember where the dining room is?”

Alison removed her hands from behind her back and gave Amy a bottle. “I got you a present, aside from me I mean.”

“Okay, now that is metal.” said Amy, noticing that a spider the size of an biscuit was floating in the alcohol.

“After you left me I did my best to examine why I fell for you.” explained Alison. “Because I did fall for you. It wasn’t all head games.”

“I do hope you won’t be dreadfully offended if we don’t drink this tonight.” said Amy cheerfully as she led Alison to a small round table with two chairs and a candle.

“Absolutely not.” said Alison cheerfully. “I understand that you have a refined palette and I must be equally refined if I am to grace it.”

Amy carried the spider alcohol over to the bar area then bought over a drink of iced water with lemon and lime juice. “If you would begin by drinking this”

“Certainly.” said Alison with a smile then she reached between her breasts and pulled out a slip of paper. “This is for you by the way.”

Amy looked uncertainly at Alison as she examined the note.

“Claudia’s been keeping a record of my diet and has noted down the preparations she made to me before arriving.” said Alison proudly. “We figured the chef might appreciate the information.”

Amy smirked then stowed the slip of paper in her pocket. “I shall have to thank Claudia later but that is for me to worry about when the time comes. Tell me more about this drink of yours, you say I’m to blame?”

Alison chuckled. “It’s quite funny actually, in a dark and morbid way.”

“I love dark and morbid.” said Amy as she poured herself a glass of white wine.

“Well, I suppose you would.” said Alison, resting her elbows on the table as she eagerly explained. “There’s this species of spider where the females are huge and the males are teeny tiny and because food is so scarce and the odds of passing on their genes are so slight the males will actively feed themselves to the females as foreplay.”

Amy nearly spat out her drink but instead she smiled curtly and swallowed her drink quite deliberately.

“The males have numerous penis like things and the females have a similar amount of - Shall we say? - fertilisable holes.” said Alison eagerly.

Amy smirked and set down her wine as she watched Alison with gleeful interest.

“So a man will dock one sausage inside then throw himself inside the female’s mouth, grind himself up against her teeth and taste buds.” said Alison. “She’s just like weighing up the taste and is he good enough? Do I care? Meanwhile the man flings himself back outside, docks another sausage, sperm pumping all the time, before flinging himself back inside to be finished off.”

Amy chuckled. “That’s a good story.”

“I think I first heard it on the DDS, when I was but a calf, scared the benigel out of me but it must also have been at about the right time to affect my sexuality. Or wrong time I suppose.” said Alison. “Anyway after you left I found that a bunch of Nigellan monks didn’t look too fondly on this race of females voreing their men mid-coitus so they set up a novelty brewing company as an excuse to fund a eugenics breeding program to make the women feed themselves to the men. Each bottle is a female that has eaten a male mid-coitus and been drowned in vodka.”

“Hold on...” said Amy with a smirk. “Are you saying the idea of being eaten mid sex turns you on?”

Alison blushed. “Look, it was a long time ago and I respect that I’m here for one very particular reason and I’m not going to argue and -”

“Honey?” insisted Amy.

“Yes.” said Alison with a grin, her cheeks flushed pink. “I kept hoping that you’d go all spider on me that first night when I thought you were going to eat me but we ended up having sex.”

“I never even considered that as an option.” said Amy stunned. “Are you seriously telling me I’ve been conflicted about wanting to eat my girlfriend for a decade and it’s your fetish?”

Alison giggled.

Amy rested her elbows on the table then massaged her temples. “I am a moron...”

“In your defence, there’s a bit of a difference between a fetish you can survive if its acted out and one that would kill you if it was.” said Alison then she shrugged and smiled. “But now I know I can survive you...”

“Oh...” said Amy as she sat up straight and looked directly at Alison. “I probably best give you the blood of the wereshark before I forget.”

Alison grinned. “Alright, how do we want to do this?”

“I think you stand and get away from the table first.” said Amy, thinking it through carefully.

Alison rose and took a couple of paces away from the table. “And then?”

“And then I would ask how you are with love bites.” asked Amy as she rose to her feet then walking over to Alison.

“Do what you gotta do.” said Alison.

Amy nodded then she grabbed a steak knife from the table, bent down, slashed at her own ankle then licked the blood from the blade.

Alison brushed her hair away from her neck then said. “I consent and gladly receive.”

Amy bent Alison back then bit canine sharp teeth into Alison’s neck. She lapped greedily at the blood as her own blood entered Alison’s veins.

Alison gasped.

Amy withdrew her teeth and tongue but kept her lips in place. The Sylph healing abilities handled a wound like that in a second and Amy stood back. “How do you feel?”

“Like I am very disappointed I won’t get to experience you cooking me.” said Alison quietly. “When it’s just an idea I can rationalise why it isn’t a good thing but to actually feel your lips about my neck, the blood seeping from my wounds and your tongue relishing the opportunity... I just can’t even...”

“Sit down, Honey...” commanded Amy, returning to her seat.

Alison obeyed.

Amy smiled at Alison. “Today I butcher you the way the Farsh-nuke intended.”

“You really like the Farsh-nuke don’t you?” asked Alison.

Amy shrugged. “He bought me comfort when my husband went missing. We were together quite a while. Part of the reason I became Spring-heeled Jack’s Champion was in the hopes that I could get my soul sent to the same place as the Farsh-nuke.”

“You were willing to condemn yourself to eternal hell just to let the Farsh-nuke take pleasure in witnessing your agony?” asked Alison. “And now you’re trying to kill him?”

Amy shook her head. “I fully intend to try and talk the Farsh-nuke round. He’s a smart man and he loves me. He’ll see that taking possession of me again is better than fighting”

“Especially now you’re a two for the price of one deal.” said Alison with a grin.

“Oh, don’t tease me.” said Amy sadly. “You are so beautiful and adorable and I want to take you entirely under my care.”

“I’m not teasing.” said Alison warmly as she reached out to grasp Amy’s arm. “I’m just thinking things through.”

“If I could shrink you I would.” said Amy fondly. “I’d keep you caged on my night stand while I was at work then fry you up for my tea.”

Alison blushed. “Well if you find a way I’d be very interested in giving it a try.”

A timer beeped.

“And that will be your starter.” said Amy proudly as she rose to enter the kitchen.

Alison sat at the table and it occurred to her that she could run. She could leave. Tell Claudia to explain she was choosing life.

Except she didn’t.

Alison just smiled to herself.

Amy returned with cheese in potato skins with mushrooms and soy cubes. She placed the plate of food before Alison.

“Nothing for you?” asked Alison.

“Oh, I’m having a big meal later.” said Amy with a smirk.

“Right, of course.” said Alison with a smile. “Be a shame to finally have me at your table and not be hungry.”

“Oh, I’m very hungry but I’ve waited seven years, I can wait for you to be ready.” said Amy.

“You know I’m probably going to be very underwhelming when you finally get to taste me.” said Alison as she sliced into her starter. “I’m probably just like any other meat.”

“I have considered the possibility.” said Amy. “I have plenty of mint, ginger and garlic to jazz you up if you do turn out to be a turkey and not the fine deer I have been hoping for all this time.”

“Well even a turkey is good to eat for symbolic reasons.” said Alison then she lifted a morsel of food to her mouth and sighed with pleasure.

“Well, it is Nigelmass.” said Amy with a grin as she looked at Alison.

Alison wolfed down the potato skins as Amy watched then she realised Amy had been sat watching her and she flushed red from embarrassment. “Oh, I’m sorry, this is so incredibly rude. You’re hungry at hell and I’m just taunting you with my food.”

“I’m watching the woman I love being adorable.” said Amy firmly. “You have nothing to apologise for.”

Alison smiled. “I could kiss you, you’re so sweet.”

Amy chuckled. “There will be plenty of time for kissing tomorrow. Tonight is about good company and good food.”

“And good company that is good food.” said Alison with a grin.

Amy scowled. “I don’t like those jokes, you know that.”

“Well I’m sorry.” said Alison, still grinning.

“So do you like teaching at the university?” asked Amy.

“Yeah...” said Alison. “Claudia suggested it. Suggested it might help to recontextualise my experience as history, as past, as facts and figures, not raw emotion. I like the feeling of power and responsibility.”

“It is good to be in charge isn’t it?” said Amy.

“Yeah...” said Alison. “I like getting to be Miss Benchley.”

“Then you can keep your job.” said Amy.

“How incredibly generous of you...” said Alison dryly.

Amy giggled. “I’m sorry, that was rude.”

“Right, though.” said Alison with a smirk. “I’m going to be your lawful property.”

“I said, don’t tease me.” said Amy firmly.

“Sorry.” said Alison with a frown then she reached out to Amy and squeezed her hand. “So when do we know when I’m ready.”

Amy picked up the bloodied steak knife. “My dearest Alison, do I have your permission to stab you?”

“Where?” asked Alison cautiously.

“In your oh so delightful and delicate hand.” said Amy.

“Well, why not?” asked Alison lightly.

“Thank you.” said Amy then she stabbed Alison in the back of her hand.

Alison let out a small sharp high pitched yelp of pain then looked at her hand.

Amy carved through the flesh in Alison’s hand, slicing the tendons.

“Oh sweet Nigel of Basildon...” muttered Alison then she looked up at Amy curiously. “What are you doing?”

“Carving a channel.” said Amy as sliced through Alison’s hand. “Something good and deep, something Sylph regeneration alone won’t be able to heal.”

“Okay...” said Alison, nodding her understanding.

“And according to this...” said Amy, looking at Alison’s bloody hand. “Yeah, there’s no way I’m risking taking you to the basement yet.”

“The basement?” asked Alison curiously. “You got that set up again?”

Amy nodded.

Alison grinned. “Good. You should do this properly.”

“Oh I intend to.” said Amy as she rose from the table. “Now, I’m going to put your main course on. Sorry about your hand.”

“Not my meal being ruined.” said Alison with a smirk.

Amy’s laughter echoed through the house.

Alison stared at her hand.

Amy returned and said. “Okay, the timer has been set, and by the time that has finished cooking, you should be ready for the chair.”

“The comfy comfy chair.” said Alison with a grin. “Sorry, if I move and put you off your food again.”

Amy laughed.

“There’s still one thing I don’t understand though.” said Alison. “The heart pumps blood. That’s all it does. I get that magical blood makes magical hearts that keep pumping magical blood but my

mind, my memories, they're in my brain, not my heart, or hearts."

"Well yeah, you're right." said Amy. "But our world exists within a universe and that exists within a wider nothingness. The nothingness has no rules. The universe does and the rules change from universe to universe. That's how magic works. Magic is just another term for rewriting the base logic that makes up the reality of our universe. And souls are just the data associated with our existences within the universe. The hearts simply repopulate the brain with the data from the soul record. Like restoring a computer's files from the cloud."

"But my brain is the computer in this analogy and, if you destroy my computer, normally that data is lost. I am dead." said Alison. "If you cut off my head, and eat my brain, my heart might recover my body and my memories might be loaded into the duplicate made from my own matter but I could still be dead. You could live your happy ending with me and go off having sexy vampire times with me and I would still be dead."

Amy stared. "You know if you don't want me to eat you, you are allowed to say no?"

Alison snorted. "That's not what I'm saying. I want this, I want this so much but what if you do this and I die?"

"Then I get to entirely have my cake and eat it and you go off with Pacifus Subis to enjoy eternal bliss." said Amy with a shrug. "You're a champion of light and we have proof that heaven is real. You'll be fine."

"Alright..." said Alison with a smile.

The timer beeped.

Amy grinned as she rose from the table.

Alison looked at her hand. It had fully healed. She flexed it and smiled.

Amy emerged with a gorgeous platter of vegetarian food for Alison to dine upon.

"If you do kill me, do you think I count as a sacrifice?" asked Alison.

"What are you thinking?" asked Amy.

"The Great Red Dragon And The Beast From The Sea." said Alison curiously. "What if there was a way to soothe the nerves of The Beast From The Sea? What if the fighting could be averted?"

"It would be nice, wouldn't it?" said Amy with a sad smile. "I do love the Farsh-nuke but I don't think I can save him from this, all I can do is hope to mitigate the damage."

"Alright." said Alison cheerfully. "May I eat?"

"I insist." said Amy with a grin.

So Amy sat and watched Alison eat. She felt proud to be so pleasuring the young woman at her dinner table.

Finally Alison licked her lips clean and grinned. "Excellent as ever. So is there any desert?"

“Might I have your hand again?” asked Amy.

Alison nodded. “You may.”

“Thank you kindly.” said Amy as she stabbed Alison again.

Alison yelped.

Amy carved through Alison’s flesh, severing sinew and muscles as she exposed bone. Then in the course of a few seconds Amy watched Alison’s hand knit itself back together. “Honey, I love you very deeply but do you think you could wait until tomorrow for dessert?”

“I might be able able to, yeah...” said Alison curiously. “What are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking that I have the honour of talking to a weresylph, I’m thinking that I’m very hungry and I’m thinking that I have a comfy chair I’d like you to sit on. Would you join me in the basement?” asked Amy.

“I’m thinking that if you are asking permission to butcher, cook and eat me, that my answer would have to be a very enthusiastic yes.” said Alison eagerly.

Amy rose to her feet.

Alison rose to hers.

“I love you.” said Amy, her eyes watering as reached out to stroke Alison’s cheek. “I love you so very much, you beautiful, adorable and utterly endearing woman.”

“And I love you too Mistress...” said Alison earnestly. “Eat well.”

Amy kissed Alison lightly on the lips. “Thank you.”

“It’s a pleasure.” said Alison earnestly.

Amy kissed Alison passionately.

When Alison was released she was feeling utterly overjoyed and in awe of her Mistress.

Amy snapped Alison’s neck then caught her as she fell. She carried Alison’s body down into her basement then began what she had spent a decade wanting to do.

*

There was a knock at the door as Amy ate.

Amy went to the door and found a massive roll of fake silken cobwebbing alongside a note saying.

Do It Right
Sincerely, Gfaxxy Quluwmcy

Amy smirked and carried the roll inside. She leant it against the wall then she returned to the table.

Amy sat down to continue her meal and looked proudly at Alison's severed head, currently impaled on a large upturned nail within a large bowl to catch the drips.

She raised a glass. "To the best steak I have ever tasted." Amy sipped from the wine then tickled Alison's one remaining heart. It sat beating away in a bowl of iced water. Amy had eaten the other two hearts but she kept Alison's human heart alive and fawned over it like a proud parent while she ate course after course of Alison's flesh.

*

Alison woke up naked in a cocoon. She could barely move and there were fibres in her mouth. She called out "Amy! Mistress! Pacifus!"

A blade came down between her legs then sliced upwards until it freed her.

Amy pulled Alison's head out from the cocoon. "You have become my Honeybee..." said Amy proudly.

That was the moment Alison realised she was laying within a gigantic cobweb and Amy was utterly naked as the great red spider.

"The fuck is going on?" asked Alison.

"Gift courtesy of Gfaxxy Quluwmcy." said Amy gleefully. "Figured it was only right that I birth you into your new life within a tableau."

Alison stared. "So you've done it then, you've eaten me?"

"Well not all of you but yeah." said Amy.

Alison giggled. "I love you."

"Yeah..." said Amy with a grin. "And I will tell you something else. Totally worth it."

"Really?" asked Alison.

"Best meal ever." declared Amy.

Alison blushed.

"Now come on, we need to shower and get dressed." said Amy.

"Mistress." nodded Alison as she extracted herself.

*

They kissed and embraced in the shower then they dried off and dressed.

Amy led Alison into the kitchen, where she had already prepared sausages and bacon for the meal.

"Would you like eggs?" asked Amy.

“Sure.” said Alison. “Where do you keep them?”

Amy whistled.

Alison’s eyes widened. “What was that?”

“May I have permission to touch your pussy?” asked Amy.

“If you promise to never call it that again, yes.” said Alison warily.

Amy slid her hand up Alison’s skirt and removed an egg that looked very similar to a chicken’s egg, she cracked it against the side of the pan then released the yolk and white into the pan.

“I really hope that was street magic.” said Alison.

“Nope.” said Amy. “Would you like to make that two fried eggs with your breakfast?”

“Sure.” said Alison dubiously.

Amy whistled again.

Alison’s eyes widened.

Amy waved her hand. “Permission?”

“Yes, take the egg..” said Alison testily.

Amy smirked and removed the egg from Alison’s skirt, cracked it against the side of the pan then poured the contents into the hot oil.

“Since when could I lay eggs?” asked Alison.

“Since I left you, actually.” said Amy cheerfully. “And you can be milked.”

“Milked?” asked Alison dubiously.

Amy nodded. “You are the perfect cattle.”

Alison thought for a moment then she smiled. “I think I like that.”

“Good.” said Amy.

They ate breakfast together then Amy said. “I have something to show you.”

So Alison followed Amy into the basement.

“Open the fridge.” said Amy.

Alison opened the fridge and looked into the dead eyes of her own severed head. “Okay, now that is creepy.”

“I want to get it stuffed and mounted.” said Amy as she put an arm round Alison’s shoulders. “A reminder that I did it. I got you. Because I did, Honey, I got you and I butchered you and I ate you and now, with your permission, I’d like to own you.”

Alison smirked. “Kind of romantic when you put it like that... Alright. Alright, you can own me.”

“I don’t deserve you.” said Amy.

“No.” agreed Alison as she grinned. “You really really don’t.”

Alison closed the fridge then she looked to the throne and said. “Your chair’s gone?”

“It was made out of people.” said Amy with a shrug.

“So make another one.” said Alison embracing Amy.

Amy smirked. “Alright...”

The doorbell rang.

*

“This is a contract giving me and my estate majority ownership of Alison Benchley that we will only ever use if you are so heinous she begs for legal intervention.” said Claudia holding up a thick pile of paper. “And this is ginger flavoured Pass-Through Brandy.” said Claudia holding up a bottle in her other hand. “May I assume you have leftovers?”

“I thought you were vegan?” said Amy, accepting the contract and the brandy.

Claudia embraced Alison lovingly and ran a hand through her hair. “Well, when I know the cattle survives, enjoys the experience and consents then I’m willing to make an exception.”

“You want to eat me too?” asked Alison, blushing.

“I’m curious.” said Claudia with a smirk.

Amy set aside the contract and the brandy then went to a different fridge and handed Claudia a plate of cold cuts. “Go. We are going out.”

“We are?” asked Alison.

“Yes, we are.” said Amy happily. “And don’t worry there is more meat where that came from.”

Alison giggled.

“Well enjoy yourselves.” said Claudia cheerily as she left.

“We will.” said Amy firmly, heading outside herself.

Alison followed along in her wake and closed the door.

*

Amy and Alison stood before the vet nervously as he checked through the contract.

“Okay, everything seems to be in order.” said the vet. “You may now consider Alison Benchley your legal property.”

Amy grinned and squeezed Alison tight. “Could we get a soul brand?”

The vet looked at Alison then said. “It will hurt. I mean it is a brand literally burned into the flesh and soul.”

Alison looked up at Amy and smiled. “We all make sacrifices for the ones we love.”

Amy stroked Alison’s cheek fondly. “My precious Honeybee, such trials you have endured for me.”

*

Amy listened to Alison scream and she could not help feeling sadistic pleasure at the suffering of her lover.

The vet removed the branding tool and turned off the logic element.

Alison panted. “That - That was not fun.”

Amy kissed Alison lightly on the lips.

Alison smiled. “Is there anything else you’d like to do to me.”

“Walk with me.” said Amy.

*

Amy and Alison walked around a nearby lake.

“I haven’t quite been honest with you.” said Amy.

“Oh no, I am shook.” said Alison dryly as they walked.

“You have a girlfriend, I know.” said Amy.

“Well of course you do, you’re the pet of gods.” said Alison sagely.

“I know because I did my research before I came here. She matters to you doesn’t she?” asked Amy gently.

Alison fell silent.

Amy let the silence linger.

“You left me, Amy. You left me and you burned me and you made me hate you. Of course I moved on.” said Alison quietly.

“Alison, I didn’t come here to ruin your life and take you from the woman you love.” said Amy gently.

“Then what the fuck was last night about?” asked Alison angrily. “Why did you brand me and why do you own me?”

Amy smiled at Alison. “Let it out. Let it out I deserve it. I know I do.”

“Amy, I did this because I love you, because submitting to you makes me happy. If you want to take me home with you then I’ll be a good little girl but what the hell are you doing? Messing with my head? Yanking my chain?” Alison screamed, she picked up a stone from the bank and hurled it into the lake. The ripples dissipated within a moment.

“Alison, I’ve stopped eating Sapients. As a Thrall I don’t need to eat them like a proper Vampire and now I’m not the champion of the King of Hell I don’t have too kill as often as I once did. I came back here to let you go. To let that last part of me go.” said Amy quietly.

Alison screamed. “Why is it always about you!?”

Amy said nothing.

“You wanted me. You stalked me. You chose to continue my studies. You chose to have me move in with you. You chose to make me a champion of Pacifus Subis. You chose to burn me. Yoou choose to eat me. You chose to fucking own me!”

Alison hurled another stone into the lake.

“You chose to come home with me. You chose to make me fall in love with you. You chose to be eaten. You chose to stay. You chose to save Lindsay’s life. You chose to send me after the Puppet Master. You chose a lot of things about our relationship, Alison. Choose again. Choose now. Me or her. Me or the woman you’ve got waiting for you.” said Amy calmly.

Alison stared at Amy.

Amy held up her hands. “Before you make your choice though, remember this, I own you and I am not ever going to let that change. We can wait as long as you like and do this at your pace.”

Alison nodded. “I love you Amy and that will never ever change.”

“I know and I love you too.” said Amy sweetly.

“You hurt me Amy. You hurt me so much and I am happy now. I have a life with this woman. She wants me to go travelling. We’re having fun and it’s normal. It’s so delightfully normal.” said Alison quietly.

Amy nodded. “Then love her. I’ll catch the Puppet Master, if you fall in love with this woman.”

Alison smiled at Amy. “Alright, I guess I owe you that much.”

Alison and Amy kissed then Alison strode off.

Amy picked up a stone a skimmed it across the lake.

Viorum Kaztif-tan appeared from the ether a moment later, grabbed Amy’s hand and then they were gone.